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# RUSSIA

## HER STRENGTH AND HER WEAKNESS

A Study of the Present Conditions of the Russian Empire, with an Analysis of its Resources and a Forecast of its Future

BY

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND, Ph.D.

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# PREFACE

WITH the considerable number of books on Russia extant, it may well be asked why the present work was written. The answer to that must be: because, so far as the author knows, no previous monograph is in existence either covering the same ground or dealing in the same spirit with the subjects discussed.

It has been the author's main object in this book to lay bare, without bias either way, the sources and extent of both Russia's strength and weakness, and to do so on the most reliable and most recent data and authorities. How far he has been successful in this must be left to the reader's own judgment. In the book itself it is pointed out that the searcher after truth is labouring under peculiar difficulties in dealing with facts concerning Russia. These difficulties have been overcome so far as that seemed humanly possible. But no claim for infallibility has been set up here. Indeed, on many minor points the author is open to correction.

It is not believed, however, that any indulgence is necessary in the case of the main contention made in this book; namely, that by pursuing for another considerable length of time the present policy of foreign aggression and utter disregard of internal needs, Russia is on the road to national perdition.

The chief factors standing on the one side for Russia's territorial expansion, and on the other for the present state of calamitous decay of internal resources, have been carefully and calmly considered one by one. It seems to the writer certain that the conclusion which he has arrived at, being based on premises which in the main are unshakable, cannot be far from the truth. Indeed, to any impartial mind once in possession of the chain of cohesive facts, the conclusion seems inevitable.

Two all-important facts strike the observer of the Russia of to-day.

For one, we see a steady and rapid territorial expansion, adding constantly to the empire vast lands which are ever farther and farther from the centre of power and which are inhabited by races having neither community of blood nor of sympathies with the main body of the population. This expansion has for many years been inordinately straining all the resources of the empire, to the complete neglect of pressing internal reforms. And all along the rate of this territorial growth has been so fast as to leave the body politic no time for assimilating the new accretions. The enormous aggrandisement of Russia under these circumstances forms one of the great causes of its intrinsic weakness; all this irrespective of the consideration that the huge and increasing bulk of the empire has added to its prestige and to the fear in which it is generally held.

The second ruling fact is found in the peculiar in-

ternal conditions of Russia, the latter term in this instance being confined in the main to the European portion, that is, the one which ultimately must infuse the vaster Asiatic part with population, capital, and a new moral standard. As the determining elements in these conditions must be mentioned: the increasing exhaustion of Russia's "black-earth belt," that is, that region with the final redemption or total impoverishment of which Russia must stand or fall; the present financial policy, based on a hothouse industry (foredoomed from the start to eventual failure), and to an enforced large excess of exports over imports; and, finally, the prevailing system of centralisation and of alienating all non-Russian elements, which form fully one-third of the total population.

The deduction from all this must be, as a leading Russian writer not long ago expressed it: "When the core is unsound, how can the branches be healthy?"

The Russian problem, in any event, is a gigantic one. Its solution, one way or the other, will directly and indirectly contribute a great deal to the solution of the whole problem of mankind. A power which holds in its grasp one-sixth of the land on this globe of ours, is no negligible quantity. For weal or woe, the cause of Russia is also our own cause. Her prosperity or degeneracy, the question whether her 130 millions will within the near future find or fail to find the form of government best adapted to their welfare and their development, concerns every one of us very closely.

For the reaction on other nations, whichever the outcome, must necessarily be very strong.

As to the information upon which the author has relied in predicating his facts and arguments, all that is needful to say is that it came to him partly during an extensive tour through European and Asiatic Russia undertaken some years ago, and that another part has been derived from the best available and original sources, Russian by preference, and very largely official, such as government reports, published budgets and decrees, memorials written by former or present Russian statesmen and men of affairs. This has been supplemented by extracts, statistics, quotations, and arguments taken from the writings of the foremost Russian statisticians and economists. The Russian newspaper and periodical press has also been consulted and made use of to some extent. For a final part of his information, quantitively small but intrinsically very valuable, the author owes thanks to a dear friend in St. Petersburg.

W. v. S.

New York, March 15, 1904.

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# GLOSSARY

ARSHEEN—about sixteen inches.
ARTEL—an organised body of workmen.
BATOOSHKA—"Little Father," used as a term of respect.
DESSYATINE—2400 square sashe, or about 2½ acres in English or American measurement.
ISPRAVNIK—police commissioner.
IZBA—peasant's hut.
KIBITKA—a light Russian vehicle.
KNIAZE—prince, title for the old Russian nobles.
KOPEK—copper coin, the hundredth part of a rouble.
MIR—village commune.
OBROK—"head money," an annual payment formerly required of serfs allowed to reside in towns.
OURIADNIK—rural policeman.
POOD—about forty pounds.
QVAS—a sort of beer.
ROUBLE—about fifty to fifty-two cents in American money, or two shillings in English money.
STAROSTA—head of a village chosen by the commune.
STARSHINA—mayor of a volost.
STSHI—a national dish made of cabbage.
SVIETELKA—a rural co-operative factory.
TRAKTIR—a tavern.
VERST—1166 yards.
VODKA—Russian spirits.
VOLOST—administrative unit composed of several village communes.
ZEMSKI NATCHALNIK—official controlling peasant affairs in a province.
ZEMSTVO (plural, ZEMSTVA)—provincial chamber.

# RUSSIA

## CHAPTER I

### RUSSIAN EXPANSION

**The Territorial Growth of Russia Similar to that of the United States—Period before Peter the Great the Happiest the People ever Knew—Process of Extension and the Causes for It—Military Schooling of an Unwarlike Nation in the Strife with Turkey and Sweden—Instinct, not Statesmanship, the Motive Power of Expansion—Have the People been Benefited Thereby?—No Internal Progress for a Space of 150 Years—Autocratic Ambitions the Mainspring of Russia's Foreign Policy—Racially the Russians, as Shown by their History, are Peace-Loving—The Old Russian Party and its Survival to this Present Day—The Warning of a Great Russian Statesman Unheeded—The Russian Masses Look upon the Wars with Turkey as Modern Crusades—Strange Part Played by the Cossacks in the Formation of this Sentiment—The Latest War with Turkey, and after**

THE growth of Russia has proceeded on lines somewhat similar to those followed in the development of the United States. The causes, too, underlying the rapid expansion show a close similarity. Looking at the map of the world and seeing the enormous territory

over which the Russian flag now flies, it seems a remarkable fact that but a few short centuries ago this boundless Russia was a conglomeration of small states mutually independent of each other and jointly occupying a land in extent of territory even below France of to-day.

Indeed there was a time when Russia was split up into more than seventy small states, each governed by its own ruler. In more than one respect this was the happiest time the Russian people have ever known. But at the close of the sixteenth century, Moscow had destroyed the power of nearly every one of its weaker fellow-states, and had either established suzerainty over them, or had incorporated them, or had made them dependent on her. A century later, Peter I. arose and devoted his life to the extraordinary experiment of transmuting a Muscovite State, Asiatic and wholly devoid of a culture of its own, into a semi-European Empire of Russia. He transferred the political centre to his new seat of government, St. Petersburg, far to the north and lying in a morass, but affording him the much-coveted "little window looking upon Europe."

Two centuries have elapsed, and an enormous empire is now under the sway of the White Czar's sceptre, an empire welded together more or less firmly out of the fragments that had skirted Russia proper, assimilating more or less successfully innumerable hordes and tribes, all of them more barbarous and possessing less cohesive power than the old Russian communities. Territorial

accretions have come to Russia very much in the same way in which they came to the United States. With the exception of her systematic strife with Turkey and, under Peter I., with the Sweden of Charles XII., Russia had no able-bodied foe to contend with in her instinctive spread towards the East and North. True, Russia obtained her military schooling in these Turkish and Swedish wars, and it was by means of these wars that she imposed upon Europe the keen perception that a new power had arisen on the vast Sarmatian plain which needs must be reckoned with. But the acquisitions themselves secured from Turkey and Sweden were insignificant in point of size and natural wealth compared with those which Russia obtained almost without a stroke of the sword, largely by the force of attrition which a centralised and homogeneous larger nation exerts far beyond its frontiers upon smaller and ill-organised political entities.

And that brings to mind the fact that Russia's expansion policy, particularly in its earlier stages, up to about 1850, has by no means been the result of such rare astuteness and so clearly recognised a system as that for which the world has given her credit. Indeed, Russia has but followed in a half-conscious way the *Drang nach Osten* of which we have heard so much of late years. Ever beyond her borders were lands and peoples that stood in her way, restless barbarians who delighted in plundering the Russian settlers and who had to be brought under the iron yoke of the Little

Father in St. Petersburg in order to be taught respect for their neighbours' property.

The aggrandisement of Russia has thus proceeded at a rate not even equalled by the United States. The growth of Russia since 1500 and up to 1900 has been phenomenal. During the last century, the movement has retarded somewhat, but in 1894, at the accession of the present ruler, Nicholas II., Russia had attained to a compact body of about nine million square miles, and even the loss of Alaska, with its 400,000 square miles, did not weigh much in the balance. Even then, however, her expansion did not cease, as is shown by the history of events in the Amoor and Ussuri regions, and later still, in Manchuria. All this, it is quite safe to say, had little to do with far-sighted statesmanship, with a well-planned system, and still less with mere diplomacy—though it is precisely Russian diplomacy that has been so much admired in this connection. This expansion towards the East has rather come, step by step, in the elementary and resistless manner of a natural law. The fabled testament of Peter the Great, even if it were believed in, concerned itself only with the conquest of Constantinople and of that relatively small intervening strip of the Balkan peninsula.

Surely the growth of Russia into the greatest power on earth, territorially considered, is the most stupendous achievement in history, when viewed from a certain angle. But has the enormous extent of the country been a blessing to the Russian people? That is for

them the only test worth while. For, after all, statesmanship as we understand it to-day has for its chief aim to promote the welfare of the people whom it claims to serve. And all political development must be reduced to the one question, whether it benefits that nation whose shoulders and purses support it. Doubtless the glory of arms and the power of dominion belong to those things which a warlike, ambitious nation prizes. The less cultured a people the higher, as a rule, it prizes these things. At the dawn of the Middle Ages, at the period of race migrations, warlike fame was deemed the highest good. The Huns of Attila and the Mongolians of Djinghis Khan were without question high in their praises of these rulers, who forever lead them on to new conquests, pillage, and slaughter. But to-day we apply a different measure. We do not underrate martial fame and increased dominion, but we no longer value them in themselves: we esteem them only in so far as they are connected with our civilisatory missions, so far as they furnish us with the means to strengthen us materially and spiritually, so far as they enable us to mature morally and to promote our ideals in life.

The welfare of a people demands not only external power and glory, but in a much greater degree all those factors which make for peaceful internal culture and civilisation, for a higher standard of life. Nay, more, war and conquest have sunk so low in our scale that they are regarded to-day as evils, only to be applied in

case of extremest need or for the sake of our most cherished boons.

When considered in this way, the growth of Russia presents a startling anomaly. Without culture of its own, this new power, from the start, faced civilised Europe with the claim of equality. Peter the Great had left his dominions in a state of horrible confusion and exhaustion, but at least his purpose had been to develop the slumbering forces of his subjects in the direction of civilisation. His successors abandoned the work which he had begun. For a century and more, nothing was done in the way of bringing the Russian people up to a higher level. Catherine II., brilliant as her reign was outwardly, did very little for the welfare of her people. Since Peter's time it has been a ceaseless course of experimenting in administration and legislation: here something was introduced, there something abolished, without system or plan, as the humour took each ruler, without patience or special knowledge. A century after the first appearance of the great reformer, Russia had indeed developed into a tremendous European power, inspiring fear where she did not command respect, but internally she had scarcely progressed on the road of material and intellectual growth. The word of Napoleon I., *Grattez le Russe et vous trouverez le Tartare*,[1] was literally true, and, moreover, is true to-day. It was and is the make-believe, the sham, by which Russia has maintained her

[1] "Scratch the Russian and you will find the Tartar."

prestige towards the outer world. In the interior remains the old misery, the beggarly poverty, the corruption, the ignorance, the formal observance of Church dogma, the arbitrary power of the bureaucracy. Three things only had been attained—a brilliant court, a large army, and the total subjection of every class of the people.

These three things were necessary to enable Russia to play the rôle of a great power, and this was the one aim which since Peter's time every Russian ruler has striven for. There was a shining court to give relief to the new-born empire; a gigantic army to conquer new territory and to give weight to Russia's voice in the councils of Europe; the compulsory service of the nobility, the shackling of the townspeople within the confines of their town, the serfdom of the peasant,—all intended to strengthen the power of autocracy merely to have a sufficiency of officials, soldiers, and money. And for this sham glory, for external power, the weak forces of the nation at home were exploited pitilessly. This is the system which has survived in Russia to this present day.

Warlike ardor and craving for political power are by no means characteristic traits of the Russian people. When the Norman vikings established their power over the Russian hordes they met with very little resistance on the part of the Slavic tribes; though small in number, they conquered the latter, more than a hundred times their numerical strength, with as much ease as

Britons many centuries later conquered the innumerable hosts in India. And all through the period of Varangian power they found it much more difficult to bring the Turkish and Mongolian tribes, such as the Polovzi, Petchenegians, and Khazars, under their sway, than the Muscovites proper. The resistance, too, of the Russians to the Mongolian irruption in the thirteenth century was curiously feeble. There is, in fact, every evidence to show that the Russian, individually and collectively, is not made of that stern stuff out of which is fashioned the conqueror. Not the Slavic peoples of the Russia of to-day were warlike and greedy of power, but only the Norman rulers over them. This remained true even after the time when but the Prince of Muscovy was left as sole autocrat. And with the extinction of this Muscovite dynasty of Norman adventurers, the love of war and conquest died down. The great struggle during the whole seventeenth century between Poland and Muscovy was due to the former; Poland was ever the aggressor during that long period, and the dash and valour of that branch of the Slavic race were by no means equalled by the Russians. It is a well-known fact that even to-day the best soldiers in Russia's immense army come from the plain of the Vistula and have Polish blood in their veins. The brain, too, in the Russian army is either Teutonic (from the Baltic German provinces) or Polish. By far the best portion of the Russian cavalry is non-Russian in blood—Caucasian, Cossack, and Polish uhlans. The Russian ar-

tillery and engineer corps are both creations of non-Russians.

It was not until Peter the Great, the only really original-minded ruler whom Russia has had for four hundred years, had established himself on the throne that the sword of the conqueror once more flashed from the scabbard, but even the wars in which he engaged were undertaken in entire dissonance with popular wishes. Prince Alexis, Peter's unfortunate son, was beheaded by his own father because he strenuously opposed Peter's far-seeing policy. The Old Russian party, at the head of which Prince Alexis had faced his father, was all in favour of renouncing war and conquest. This party, entirely representative of the nation, hated with an angry hatred the new Russia of Peter's making; its leaders and spokesmen desired to restore the conquered countries to their former owners; they wanted to destroy the new empire, in order to revert to Old Muscovy with its Asiatic repose and manners. Alexis and many others with him suffered death at the hands of the great Peter, but the thought for which they had lived and died did not disappear with them. This thought has remained strong in Russia to this day. It has cropped out at every critical point in the Russian history of the last two hundred years, the thought to turn definitely from Europe and to re-establish in Moscow the old national comfort and quiet, avoiding interference with European countries and affairs, avoiding war, and lightening the burden of taxes.

These were the aims of such Russian statesmen and popular mouthpieces as the Princes Golizyne and Dolgorouky under Peter II. and Anna. The attempt made to place barriers against Anna's autocracy was in conformity with the party of Alexis; the conspirators of those days hoped to attain their ends by raising Elizabeth to the throne. Every indication we possess of those troubled days points to the fact that the Russian nobility and people were in entire harmony with such a programme. The leading representative men of Russia continued in their opposition to the policy of Peter the Great and his disciples, the Ostermanns, Muennichs, Bestousheffs, and their faces were firmly set against wars of conquest with the Turks, Swedes, and Persians. They were strongly opposed to Russian interference with Frederick the Great in the Seven Years' War, and a hundred years after Peter's death would have been willing to abandon St. Petersburg itself and to cease meddling with European affairs. This so-called Moscow party was national and Russian in the strict sense, and it is a question even to-day whether the instinct that guided them was not sounder than were Peter's great plans. For the results of Peter's policy, adhered to as it has been by the rulers of Russia ever since, by no means are adequate to the awful sacrifices which the people had to make for it. After a century of aggrandisement and conquest, of martial glory and brilliant prestige, the conditions in which the Russian nobility, clergy, and peasantry were living had not improved,

but had actually become much worse than under the old Muscovite system.

During the reign of Catherine II., in 1789, an observant French visitor at the Russian court, J. B. Scherer, wrote in a memorial to the Empress: "Above all, Russia must avoid war. Never will Russia gather the fruits of Peter the Great's efforts, never will she obtain a balance of trade in her favour, and never will she become enlightened and flourishing until she has abandoned her policy of conquest."

Twelve years later, in 1801, the all-powerful Russian premier, Prince Panine, wrote in another memorial: *La guerre la plus heureuse ne peut que l'affaiblir et augmenter les embarras de son gouvernement, en disseminant des forces, qui depuis les dernières acquisitions ne sont plus proportionnées a l'étendue des limites.*[1] And Panine was one of the most sharp-sighted and patriotic statesmen whom Russia has produced. But at his time, too, it was only at the court of the Czar and its environment that Russia was warlike and desirous of glory. Outside of St. Petersburg and within the mass of the people, there was then, and there is now, a deep longing to keep aloof from Europe and to be free of costly military entanglements. And how could it be otherwise, since forty years of incessant war had

[1] "The most successful war will only weaken and increase the difficulties of your Imperial Majesty's government, in scattering those forces which since our latest acquisitions are no longer proportioned to the extent of our dominions."

plunged the country into incredible internal disorder and fearful poverty! That was the time when the "divine" Catherine died.

But the Emperor Paul was not warned, for he continued the policy of conquest as his predecessors had done. He began war against England for the sole purpose of obtaining the Island of Malta, he having been chosen Grandmaster of the Order. No serious Russian interests of any kind were involved in the issues of that war. Later on, after the brief era of peace-loving Panine, Prince Kotshoubey attempted to develop the interior resources of the nation, but again events turned out very differently. Russia's armies spread over the whole of Europe. At the close of his life, in 1824, Alexander I. himself made this confession: "Of glory and honour I have had enough; but when I reflect how little has been done for the welfare of the nation, the thought weighs on my heart like a lump of ten pood."[1]

During the reign of Alexander I. we see for the first time a counter-current. Groups of his officials and army officers were conspiring for the attainment of freer forms of government. But this desire had not been born on Russian soil; these men had acquired, by practical contact with conditions in European countries, an admiration for the latter. Among the people themselves the burdens brought about by the Napoleonic campaigns were accepted like decrees of fate. It was the French invasion of 1812 and the burning of Moscow

[1] A pood, Russian weight, about forty pounds.

which had wakened the stolid Russian soul. But the point of view taken by the masses was a curious one: Religious considerations dominated. Not one of the endless wars of the eighteenth century had had a deeper effect; this one against Napoleon stirred the masses. When they saw "the Gauls with their twenty allied nations" fleeing across the frontiers, they had the sensation as if all the foreign ideas and ways which they hated so cordially went with them, leaving them once more complete masters of their own. To this day, at Christmastide, a prayer of thanks is offered up in all the Russian churches and chapels for the "driving-out" of the Napoleonic hosts. To the low-class Russians these hosts had not seemed a French army, but rather the entirety of Europe, of a foreign country which for two hundred years had been attempting to force its modes of thought and action upon the Orthodox Russian. For to the uneducated Russian, and even to many of the better-educated ones, the European is, like the Tartar and Turk, an "Unchristian," an Antichrist, a hereditary foe of his nation and creed.

This hereditary enmity towards Tartars and Turks, a settled feeling in the soul of the Russian, has been, up to the present day, a very important factor in Russia's external policy. After shaking off, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the humiliating remnants of the ancient Tartar yoke, the strife revived with the khanates in the South and South-east. The Cossacks on the Dniepr and Don with their constant raids became

national heroes. In the free settlements upon the Don, in the Ssetche, and in the Cossack camps of the lower Dniepr, there was real warlike ardour; for the Cossacks were animated in their guerilla warfare not only by the love of plunder but in like measure by the thirst of glory. And these Cossacks, while battling with the Tartars of the Crimea, and the Turks, frequently, too, with the Russians and Poles, developed into a people of Spartan virtues, a people with a pronounced love of liberty, unique in this respect in the whole of Russia.

True, their former liberties, their independence of every other power save that of their self-chosen *hetman*, were lost after a while. During the seventeenth century, the Cossacks, little by little, were made to bow to Polish and Russian power. The left shore of the Dniepr, and later on Kieff itself, became Russian, and next Peter the Great stormed on, and after the battle of Poltava and the death of Mazeppa it was all over with Cossack freedom. By hook or crook their liberties were curtailed and their resistance broken. Catherine II. subjected the eastern settlements, and from that hour on there existed no more free Cossacks. But the tradition of Cossack warfare against the unbelievers survived all over Russia, and since Peter I.'s days, this tradition became a strong aid to the czars in all their hostile undertakings against the Tartars and Turks. After the Tartars had been completely overpowered during Catherine's reign, this tradition spent its force against the Turks. This, however, was systematically

furthered by the autocratic government at the capital city. There were times when even this tradition, really the only one that has ever spurred on the Russian masses to bold enterprise, became lifeless. That was the case, for instance, in the reign of Anna. The campaigns of her ambitious premier, Muennich, demanded such horrible sacrifices in blood and money, in taxes and spoliation, that the Russian people would gladly have accepted the total defeat of their army if therewith they could have purchased permanent peace. For they felt that these sacrifices were out of all proportion to the possible gains to the nation.

And in any event it was only during the reign of Catherine, especially since her Turkish war of 1792, that this semi-religious sentiment took on the form of something resembling a settled national policy. Only since then dates the conscious effort of Russia to acquire possession of Constantinople, to drive the Turks from Europe, and to erect a new Russian Czardom on the Bosphorus. The Orthodox Church in Russia became the artful instrument in the hands of the Czar in this matter. With its help, the popular tradition originally directed against the Tartars became the self-imposed sacred charge to win back Byzantium for the Orthodox Church, and to liberate the Slavic brother populations on the Balkan peninsula from the galling yoke of the unbelievers.

This naïve, almost childlike, but nevertheless very potent sentiment of the Russian masses, combining, in

an extraordinary manner, dimly felt religious prejudices with a concrete ideal of unequalled glory and power, has been manipulated for a century past with a skill rarely if ever exhibited by any government working for purely selfish purposes. The mysticism forming an integral part of every normal Russian has been used as a catspaw by autocracy to inflame the flickering spirit of patriotism, and our own time has seen a marvellous illustration of this in the year 1876. At that time the anti-Turkish sentiment, nourished for decades by such leaders of Panslavic thought as Katkoff (the all-powerful editor of the *Moscow Gazette*), Ignatieff, and General Skobeleff, literally carried the Emperor Alexander II. off his feet. He was no longer the driver, but the driven, and though nominally the autocrat of all the Russias, he practically became the helpless instrument of his clergy and subjects in engaging in one of the bloodiest wars of the century, a war which entailed untold misery and gigantic expense on the poverty-stricken masses of Russia herself, without in the end securing for Russia even a part of its intended prey.

In the meantime, however, other important events had intervened. Russia's war with Turkey in 1828, as well as the Crimean War, resulted from the striving of her rulers to secure a pre-eminent position of power in the councils of Europe. There were no real Russian interests at stake at the outbreak of either of these terrific struggles. Only Russian prestige was in danger,

and even of that only the prestige in the Balkan and in Greece. Russia's campaign in 1849 against the rebellious Hungarians was without a shadow of provocation, and the despotic whim of Nicholas I. was its only justification.

The century was drawing towards its close when Russia for the first and only time drew the sword for the safeguarding of important and tangible interests. And the twentieth century had opened when, at the Boxer risings in China, she stood shoulder to shoulder with the other great powers of the world, though again isolated from them both by material and moral considerations. Out of that conflict indirectly grew the war with Japan.

## CHAPTER II

### RUSSIA AS A WORLD POWER

The Claims of Russia Rest Solely on her Enormous Size—What Russia has Done and Left Undone in Developing her Asiatic Possessions—The Muscovite as a Coloniser—Prospective Prosperity of Transcaucasia, Turkestan, and Southwestern Siberia—Foreign Enterprise There—Grumblings of the Russian Press—Russia Distinctively an Asiatic and not a European Power—A Parallel between Russian and English Colonising Methods, Showing a Striking Contrast—The Paucity of Native Capital—The Rôle which the Cossack has Played—Russia's Part in Far Asia—It Involves a Large Increase in her National Expenditures—The Problem of Manchuria—The Russian Meets the Chinaman—Economic Superiority of the Latter—Prince Ukhtomski's Opinion—Russia's Present Expansion Policy Far Exceeding her Legitimate Needs—Her Far Asiatic Possessions the Most Unprofitable of All—Her Proper "Interest Sphere"—The Question of Russian Ascendancy within the Empire—A Summary

BY the sheer reason of her bulk Russia is accounted one of the greatest World Powers. In point of compactness she even exceeds the United States, at least since the American acquisition of the Philippines and other outlying possessions. Her extension east and west far exceeds that of any other country, and north to south she stretches from the eternal ice of Spitzbergen and Nova Zembla to almost subtropical

climes. The mean temperature of her southern shores along the Black Sea is higher than that of Rome or Madrid, and in Khiva and Bokhara the summers approach those of India in heat. Cotton grows along her southern borders, and the fruit of her Crimean peninsula rivals in flavour and size that of our own California. Enormous wastes in Eastern and Northern Siberia, the ill-famed *tundras*, are offset by vast tracts of land so fertile that they vie in their productivity with the most favoured regions of earth. In natural wealth of every description, including metals, both precious and useful, and coal, she is only exceeded by the United States. She is well favoured in rivers and lakes, and her climate is, on the whole, salubrious and invigorating. True, Russia presents in nowise the limitless resources of the British colonial empire, nor does she approach the United States in the matter of ocean facilities. But, after all, it is undeniable that, so far as nature has equipped her, she rightfully ranks with the greatest powers of this sphere.

In Russia itself one often hears the opinion expressed that the country is large enough to do without colonies. But if she has no transoceanic colonies, she is nevertheless, by reason of her Asiatic possessions, the largest colonial empire. Enormous as these are in size, they are very thinly populated, and for the mother country they bear much more the colonial character than does India for England. In Siberia, itself as large as a continent, everything has yet to be done to give it

population and civilisation. In Central Asia, nearly all remains undone. Boundless tracts are awaiting the plough, enormous mineral wealth the miner.

Since railroads have at last begun to be built with borrowed capital, these Asiatic possessions are much nearer to Russia proper. They now begin to exert a strong charm upon the speculative spirit and the enterprise of both government and nation. For fifty years, more or less, the central government has striven hard and with considerable success to create some order and security in the lands of Central Asia. Formerly nomad robber hordes despoiled the traveller and made all civilisation impossible. Despotic khans ruled their trembling subjects with a rod of iron, devastating their own dominions for the mere devilish pleasure of it, and torturing or decapitating thousands without the shadow of law.

To-day the merchant, the mechanic, the colonist, and the official travel swiftly and peacefully with the Russian mail coach or sledge, by railroad or steamer, in full security of person and property. Even in the days when the great Tamerlane was reigning, days the fabled splendour of which is still on everybody's lips in those regions, there was no such degree of quiet and well-policed order as there is to-day. Commerce increases, Russian immigration grows, and a substantial colonisation has taken root, even if for the time being the *tchinovnik* (Russian government official) and soldier still predominate.

Undeniably the Russian has certain fine qualifications for a coloniser. In his own sphere and for the particular needs of the case he is unexcelled in that capacity. Where he meets a native population of lower civilisation, he understands well how to harmonise with it; he does not wantonly oppress or harass it. He is regarded by the natives as the bringer of order and civilisation. In comparison with their former masters, he is a beneficent ruler. He leaves his Russian caste spirit at home, and he is indulgent and more than good-natured in overlooking the crotchets and foibles of the natives. The essence of good-fellowship is strong within his bosom. As long as his own government does not say the word, he shows scarcely any of that missionary zeal which distinguishes the Briton and American. He is free from that curious itching which characterises the German as a coloniser to bring everything within the rules of military precision. It will never enter his mind to engage in a campaign of nationalistic or religious proselytising as long as the Little Father in St. Petersburg has not formally ordered him to do so. Here, then, are the elements of sound and useful colonisation.

In the year 1900, twenty-eight societies were busy getting petroleum and naphtha out of the soil of Transcaucasia, and they were paying dividends as high as sixty per cent. In the rich province of Fergana have recently been discovered enormous oil wells below the fertile earth. Cotton culture has made such progress

that it furnished in the year mentioned some 7,638,200 pood (or nearly 12,000 tons); even the poor harvest of 1901 fetched about 5½ million pood. Even at this early day Russia can count on Fergana and her other colonies in Central Asia for about one-half of her raw cotton. The gold mines of Siberia furnish about forty millions of roubles in gold. That industry lies in the hands of the government, but otherwise the economic exploitation of Russian Asia at present is mainly confided to foreign capital, and to a large extent even to foreign managers, engineers, and mechanics. Thus, for instance, the very butter which to-day is brought down in weekly train-loads from Siberia to the Baltic harbours, and thence transshipped to England and elsewhere, is produced by Danish dairymen. But in any event part of the gain remains in Russia, and the fiscus draws sure and large profit from the rapid development of those provinces. This, of course, is said irrespective of the fact that it is this very fiscus which has loaded itself with an enormous burden of debt and constant expenditure in the matter of building and operating the new railroads, above all, the Siberian Railroad. These railroads, all of them, even the projected one to Tashkend and Bokhara, are worked and will continue to be worked for many years to come at a large loss, so that the interest charge on them, going as it does to foreign pockets, will remain a serious drawback.

But the forty millions of gold, after deducting the in-

considerable expenses of production, flow into the national treasury. Petroleum figured in the budget of 1901 with a collected tax of twenty-six millions, and for 1902 of twenty-seven millions. The exportation of wheat, butter, and frozen meat from Siberia helps to swell the balance of trade in Russia's favour. With that the central government makes great efforts in furthering the output of these colonial lands. In fact, many voices are being raised throughout the mother country against this policy, charging the government with favouring these border districts at the expense of Russia proper. An authority in national economics, M. Golovine, recently wrote in the *Rossya:* "We may be sure that on the part of our government the more is done in the way of awakening economic life in a district, the more distant from the centre it is and the feebler and the more neglected by nature. It is really time to think at last of the centre of Russia."

Only thirty or forty years ago Russia took pride in pretending to be a European civilised state. To-day, on the other hand, the opinion begins to prevail of those who feel themselves as a pushing and most important Asiatic or semi-Asiatic power. Certainly there has come a great change in this respect. And indeed there is more reason for Russia to feel pride as an Asiatic rather than a European power. On the one side there has been a fruitless though constant effort made by Russia to advance in a westerly direction, both by conquest and by adapting her civilisation. These

efforts have cost Russia, as shown in another chapter, untold millions and internal prosperity; yet they have not availed her a jot. On the other hand, she has doubtless conquered for herself a formidable place by advancing in an easterly and southerly direction. Her acquisition of the Caucasus unlocked a new world for Russian expansion. As a colonising venture the Caucasus has been the most successful of all. Behind the Russian soldier came the Russian *tchinovnik*, and behind the latter, again, the merchant from Russia penetrated Asia Minor and Central Asia, while the Russian peasant followed in the rear as the most effective instrument of Russification.

The forces which animate nations to engage in an expansive policy are diverse. They may proceed from the greed for power, from the ambition of great conquerors, and in that case they soon subside, usually at the death of the conqueror himself. But they may also proceed from the accumulated excess of energy and culture within a nation, and in that case they are apt to be permanent in their effects. The policy of Tamerlane is in full contrast to that of great and successful colonising commonwealths. Empires founded merely on the strength of warlike superiority have soon gone to pieces. But Rome has dominated the world for long, not only through her generals but in larger measure by the strength of her civilisation. England's expansive policy began with the protection of those of her children who left the native shore for a freer ex-

ercise of their adventurous spirit, and since then England's flag has always followed her merchant vessels and her emigrants, both being the popular bearers of her peculiar civilisation. England's policy in this respect is held a model, and no less an authority than Bismarck advised Germany to follow in Britain's footsteps. Whenever England departed from this policy, when she, too, relied solely on military prowess to found colonies, she likewise failed. The Transvaal is an apt illustration of this. England colonised with unsurpassable success in cases where, as in Australia, the peaceable forces of her civilisation had preceded her. There she succeeded without expending a penny or sacrificing a drop of blood.

The immense material, intellectual, and moral forces which Great Britain had nurtured in excess by a work of centuries,—these are the elements which have given her her valuable possessions in Australia, in America, Asia, and Africa. And all this to her undeniable benefit, not at her expense. It is safe to say that without this enormous accumulated capital of culture England would have lost her colonial possessions long ago, or, if her colonies had drained her unduly in brain and pocket, she would have died herself from exhaustion.

But now comes the case of Russia: it is very different in kind. Let us analyse her case more closely.

When we reflect that Russia has built her railroad system with money borrowed from foreign creditors,

and that she has paid for her conquests and her influence in Turkey, in Persia, in China, with loans and all sorts of gifts which had been withdrawn from the field of internal civilisation—a field where they were really much more needed — the difference between her own and England's case becomes at once very apparent. England has always acquired her colonies out of the interest fund of her civilisatory capital, the interest as well in money as in men; or perhaps the surplus would be the better term. With that, too, she has developed those colonies. The home country went on in its road of prosperity, progressing in administration, in social and economic conditions safely and conservatively despite all colonial expansion. There was always a surplus ready for each new acquisition beyond the seas, and always there were funds and energetic men of British home growth ready to take hold of the new national enterprise. At no time did the government at home have to demand of the people burdens for colonial purposes so heavy as to endanger the mother country and its denizens.

An English merchant or farmer takes with him to an English colony that sturdy independence which is needed to develop that colony and to acquire that measure of material well-being and of public order without which there could not be prosperity. He does all this without asking the government for help, being satisfied to thrive on his own account so long as the home authority or its colonial representatives merely provide a

decent amount of protection to life and property. Indeed, in not a few instances has the British colonist managed to get along pretty well even without such protection. This aggressive manhood and unconquerable love of personal liberty cannot be replaced by bureaucratic forces, nor can they be taught by official coaching and schooling. It is for that reason the English self-government has always been, and is now, the best thing for the English colonist. The government may and can indeed erect the external walls of a new national annex or outbuilding, but the internal arrangements, the inner structure, must be left to the people themselves, that is, if the whole structure is to be of real use to the nation as a whole. Else the government indulges in an expansive policy at the expense and to the injury of the people.

This last remark applies with peculiar force to the many conquests made by Russia since Peter I. As a coloniser Russia has been most successful when acting through the Cossacks, that is, through a population, or tribes, made up of or descended from runaway peasants, *moujiks*, who escaped the scourge of the great Russian taskmaster, and who were subsequently bred in a long school of individual independence, hardship, and a hand-to-hand tussle with nature.

The south of Russia in particular has grown and developed almost entirely without help from the state; in fact, it has been acquired by Russia against the desires of those hardy fugitives. Since then Russia has won

no new territory which has been of such intrinsic importance and value to her. And although these Cossacks lost their liberties one by one with the advent of Peter the Great and governmental authority, there is still, when compared with central Russia, a considerable remnant of former independence, and we never hear of famines or widespread distress in those districts of the former Cossack republics. Indeed it is with the Cossacks and the *tchinovnik* that Russia has performed, when acting in consonance, her best colonising. It is hard to see on what other elements she could have relied, since the middle classes are not numerous enough in Russia proper to successfully experiment in this connection, and since the peasant of interior Russia was, until forty years ago, bound to the soil and the chattel of his master. Now, it is true, the free peasant wanders, in ever-increasing numbers northward and eastward, but he is no pathbreaker, and his axe does not blaze the way through the Siberian or Amoor wilderness. At all events the colonising which Russia has done by means of the weatherbeaten and liberty-loving Cossack, all through the South and the whole of Siberia, did not cost her a penny, whereas her more recent acquisitions and colonies, up to her latest venture in Manchuria, have cost her immense sums with small returns.

Meanwhile Russia proceeds on her dangerous way of expansion. Her Siberian Railroad, ramshackle affair as it is and easily duplicated at half the price, cost her a clean thousand millions of roubles; the

Manchurian Railroad, the Baikal Road, and the harbours along the coast have involved a further expenditure of half a billion. So long as Siberia was left to herself, she did not cost the Russian taxpayer anything whatever. Now the new railroad is scarcely completed, and again millions upon millions have been spent on the shores of the Pacific on harbours, fortifications, settlements, magazines, ice-breakers, and a multitude of other things. An army of 200,000 men is declared necessary to protect these new acquisitions. The opening of Eastern Siberia, the construction of the harbour improvements, and of the railroads made the doubling of Russia's fleet necessary. Russia's policy on the Pacific annually swallows in interest charges and new expenditures so many millions that even the most flourishing trade would never suffice to recoup herself. This policy means, one thing and another, an increase in the Russian budget of at least 150,000,000 roubles yearly. And what for many years to come will be the financial returns of Vladivostok, Dalny, Port Arthur, the whole of Manchuria, the vast Amoor region, and the whole of the Ussuri district as well as the whole littoral along the Okhotsk Sea? It is beyond doubt that for decades this enormous part of Asiatic Russia will form one of the most distressing features of the Russian budget, requiring one supplementary grant after another. All conservative Russians are agreed on this point.

The tax screw will have to be applied in Russia with

growing rigour; and this in the case of a people impoverished to an incredible extent, a people suffering from regularly recurring famines, means more than it would in a differently situated country. The policy of Russia in Far Asia means for the government an increase of power, and it also means an accretion of millions of acres. But does Russia need these? The power of the government is now greater, far greater, indeed, than is wholesome for the people, and while these immense new territories are added to the national domain, vast districts between the Volga and Dniepr are in a worse condition than those in Western Ireland ever were.

The acquisition of Manchuria will, if carried out against the wishes of the whole civilised world, mean the addition of a country measuring over 400,000 square miles and inhabited by some seven million people of Mongolian race. How will Russia profit by it? Even now we hear of churches, schools, even of teachers' seminaries, established in that arid and thinly populated country. The Russian jingo press discusses the alleged necessity for the existence of a Far Asiatic university. A bishopric of the Orthodox Church has been established for Manchuria, and convents are being built, but built for whom? Truly, Russia has duties to fulfil towards her Asiatic possessions; but her prime duty is towards the mother country. And there, as the world knows, the Russian government has remained far behind in this duty. This subject will be taken up specifically in another part of this book.

In Eastern Siberia, from Lake Baikal down, Russia is even now working for others, not for herself. The Russian has met there his great rival of the future, the Chinaman. Everwhere in that immense region he is encountering the indefatigable son of the Celestial Empire, and the latter beats him on every count; he beats him in the rôle of workman, as in that of merchant and banker. By no stretch of imagination will the Russian ever be able to compete successfully with the frugal Chinese, as industrious as the Russian is slothful, as keen of a bargain and as accurate in keeping his commercial engagements as the Russian is the reverse. Neither can the Russian peasant, with his one hundred and seventy holidays in the year and with his vodka bottle ever lying under his pillow at night, compete with the Chinese or Mongolian tiller of the soil, abstemious and hardworking as the latter is. Within a very short time the slant-eyed Mongolian will have become the economical master of the easy-going Russian; the former will soon assume the aggressive, and Russia will find it very hard indeed to hold her own. After the few years of Russian possession in those parts conditions of the kind hinted at are already foreshadowed. Acute observers have noticed these things, and the Russian himself[1] has become aware of them. Soon

[1] Prince Ukhtomski is one of these shrewd observers. In a series of articles in his newspaper, the *Grashdanin*, he maintained that Russia was not profiting in the least by the construction of the Siberian Railroad.

the Russian, nominal suzerain of the soil, will desire the erection of another great Chinese Wall, but one to keep out the Chinese invader. And it is not alone the Chinaman the Russian has to struggle with for economical supremacy in his new-won territory. As formidable foes in their way are the Koreans, who rival their Chinese brethren in commercial agility; the Japanese, who up to the outbreak of the present war had arrived in scores of thousands as colonists, and had assumed almost complete control of the near-by sea trade; and the Americans and Germans, who have almost monopolised the import trade, not alone in industrial products but just as much in foodstuffs.

The Russian commercial fleet in Far Asia operates at a considerable annual loss. The railroads are worked by Polish engineers. What, then, is left for the Russian? Of course, there are Russian soldiers and officials. And then there is the land, arid, but capable of great productiveness if carefully tended and well irrigated. But these are methods the Russian peasant is entirely ignorant of. In fact, the Russian proper cannot even compete with his countrymen of other race in Siberia. In that vast country, enormous tracts of which, particularly in the western and southern parts, have been brought under successful cultivation, settlers from the Baltic provinces—Esthonians, Letts, Courlanders, and Finns are thriving. The Russian peasant, however, does not thrive; he has neither the energy nor the industry nor the intelligence required

there for successful colonisation. Russian nobles and capitalists who have invested in Siberian lands lack likewise the necessary qualities for success; in the majority of cases they have leased at long terms their holdings. Russia has constructed the Siberian Road and the lines feeding it, consciously or unconsciously, for the benefit of Germans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Belgians, and Swiss in the western portions, and for Americans, Chinese, and Japanese in the eastern, the terminal portions. All these nations find the Siberian Railroad good for exporting and for transit traffic. It is Russia's share to maintain the roads, to pay for the administration of the immense country intersected by them, and to provide the required armies of soldiers and fleets of naval vessels. As to the rest, raw products will take this route to reach the West and will thereby make the competition which Russian cereals have to meet still keener. And that Russia will have no chance of underselling her European and American rivals in industrial imports going to the markets of Japan, China, and Korea is settled once for all by the fact that all these nations have the cheaper sea route open to them.

To all these difficulties which Russia has to contend with has come the Anglo-Japanese treaty of alliance, dating from January 30, 1902. Such a treaty had become a probability since 1895. At that time the intervention of Russia (backed up by France and Germany) at the close of the Chino-Japanese War tore from

Japan's grasp the fruits of her victory. England hesitated for some years, being averse to thus binding herself formally to the fate of another nation of pronouncedly warlike and ambitious character like Japan, especially as the probable theatre of war would be so far away from English bases of supply. Meanwhile Russia strengthened her position, both economically and strategetically, by completing the Siberian Railroad and its branches into Manchuria. Nevertheless, Russia's position remains even to-day a very weak one in both respects, especially when compared with her two main rivals in Far Asia, Japan, and England. It is useless to point this out more in detail, since all the world has become perfectly aware of Russia's disadvantages since the outbreak of the present war. This much in any case is undeniable: Russia has invested a gigantic capital, borrowed at great sacrifice of foreign creditors, in regions which to hold will involve enormous expenditure of lives and money.

This is a colonial policy far surpassing the legitimate forces and the expansive impetus of Russia, a policy which will prove more mistaken in the end than did England's policy in South Africa and the Transvaal.

Through the portals leading into the world of the yellow race the chief civilised powers are pressing on, using their elbows in the push and looking askance at each other, as though making their way into a newly opened treasure-chamber. It is the greed for money which impels them all, and nobody seems to be think-

ing for a moment what may happen to him, once he has penetrated into the coveted place.

There is no people on earth which faces our Occidental civilisation with such animosity as does the Chinese. Wherever the Westerner has, so far, met the Chinaman on more or less equal ground, this crass contrast at once appeared. The harsh materialism of the Chinese invariably repelled the Occidental. Practically without religion or morals, without a sense of truth, honesty, or cleanliness, the Chinaman has proved an indigestible morsel, not alone in America but also in the Englishman's Australia. Laws of exclusion had to be passed against him, and against him alone, of all the nations and peoples under the sun. This is a material age, but nobody else performs the dance around the golden calf with such fervour as does the almond-eyed son of the Celestial Empire. And yet the whole world of Western civilisation is striving hard nowadays to obtain ingress in China. What will be the consequence? The Chinaman is superior to the Westerner in every economical aspect. Once he begins to assimilate those portions of our arts and crafts which seem to him to "pay"—and indeed this process of assimilation has already set in—will the yellow man not beat in the end his fellow mortal of white skin? Everything points that way.

Of all the nations competing with each other in China, Russia alone is for many thousands of miles China's neighbour. This gives her immense advantage

in establishing a predominant political influence upon that ancient land. But, on the other hand, this fact constitutes another and very momentous element of weakness for Russia, especially economically considered. That feature of the case has been sufficiently dwelt on in the foregoing. But there is another aspect to this: the moral influence of the Chinaman upon the thin population of the whole of Russian Far Asia will most decidedly be unwholesome. True, Russian administration in that quarter is even now not of a high moral order. Corruption, looseness of morals, drunkenness, and many other vices are leading traits there today. But let the Chinaman crowd into those thinly populated regions—and the tide of Chinese immigration has set in in earnest—and that far-away part of the Czar's dominions will become a high school of all the unnamable iniquity associated with the name of Chinaman. This is a very real danger for Russia, and one quite irrespective of the issues of this war.

The real interests of the Russian people are not permitted extensive ventilation in the Russian press. So-called public opinion there is nothing else than the reflex of government opinion, and the latter is variable as the winds, shifting with the slightest current of the supposed political interests involved in any incident of international scope. For a few months, at best for a couple of years, the views and aims of some particular Russian statesman or court favourite will hold sway. Then they are superseded, as like as not, by opinions

and aims making in the opposite direction. It is vacillation that rules Russia's inner councils, a fact of which everybody in Russia is aware, but which is suspected by very few foreign observers. The latter almost invariably mistake the rigidity of the Russian bureaucratic system for a settled Russian state policy.

Just now and for some years past the *Drang nach Osten* has the upper hand of Russia. But who knows how long this current will last? Certainly the Russian land hunger is a most abnormal thing. Russia, even to-day, has bitten off a great deal more than she can chew, let alone the question of digestion.

Not satisfied with her enormous acquisitions in Far Asia, the most unprofitable in every sense that have ever come to her, she has been scheming and reaching out her hand for Mongolia, for the moment the western part of it; she is not satisfied with a virtual protectorate over Persia, but demands impatiently egress on the Persian Gulf; she declares Asia Minor and the lands of the Euphrates Russian "interest spheres," and the construction of a railroad to Bagdad and the Indian Ocean by Germans and Frenchmen an infringement of Russian interests. The whole of Asia she dreams of as her future possession.

Looking at the tangible Russian interests in non-Russian Asia in the cold light of reason, what are they? In the year 1898 Russia exported industrial products of a more or less finished quality to the small amount of a trifle over twenty-one million roubles. This

amount has increased since to an annual average of twenty-six millions. Of this small amount she sent to non-Russian Asia only an average of between six and seven millions, mostly cotton goods, other textiles, and hardware. Russian commercial interests in Southern Persia and on the Persian Gulf are non-existent. Not a single Russian is living in that whole region. The case is paralleled in Abyssinia. And yet the alleged Russian interests there not long ago were inflated at the behest of the Russian government to an affair of the first national magnitude.

The real "interest sphere" of Russia in that part of Asia not yet under her flag, when viewed soberly, embraces the whole of Central Asia, and includes Northern Afghanistan and Northern Persia, with Teheran and Ispahan. From her relations with those countries Russia is profiting to-day and may profit more in the future by playing her cards well. For that reason, too, her new railroad line, that is, the one in process of construction connecting Orenburg and Tashkend, is, considered purely as an economic venture, a sound undertaking. By it Russia will obtain valuable rawstuffs, above all, cotton, and she will have there a favourable market for her industrial products, textiles, sugar, iron. This region is very large and capable of great development. Nobody is there stopping Russia's way, and even if she should lay a firm hand upon Teheran, Ispahan, Candahar, and Herat, it is not probable that England would go to war, certainly not if

Russia gave good and sufficient guarantees to confine herself, without *arrière pensee*, to the northern districts named. For many years Russia has exerted a predominant political and financial influence upon Persia, having ousted England from that position. The fine large road leading from the Russo-Persian border at Resht on the Caspian to Teheran has been built with Russian money; a loan made by Russia to Persia has brought Russian revenue control, and has flooded the country with Russian Cossacks, nominally under the command of the Shah, but in reality obeying Russia's orders, and Russian officials are now in the pay of the Shah in large numbers. Persia herself is very badly administered and will fall in time like a ripe apple into Russia's lap. This process is inevitable, unless Russia meets with a far severer check in her advance than any she has met with so far, a check not only crippling her armed resources, but also her finances. That, of course, is quite within the possibilities.

When the northern parts of Persia and Afghanistan shall have become Russian, as Khiva and Bokhara did, Russia will have a compact and fairly homogeneous colonial empire on her south-eastern confines extending from the Turkish to the Chinese frontiers, a district more conveniently located and containing more intrinsic possibilities of commercial exploitation than almost any other now held by the different European colonising powers. It would be a task worthy of far-seeing Russian statesmanship to bend the country's energies in

that direction, and such a task would fully tax Russia's expansive powers for many years to come. For Russia is intrinsically far too feeble to scatter her forces in the manner she has done of late years. With the completion of the direct railroad connecting Tashkend via Orenburg with Moscow, Russia's economic independence, one of the most important paragraphs in M. de Witte's programme, would have been nearly established. But the district spoken of, as well as Turkestan, will require great labour and vast sums for their proper development.

Russia's excessive expansion policy involves another serious disadvantage besides the one of unduly draining the national capacities of capital and energy. It carries with it a further and very injurious extension of her bureaucratic system, a system which is among the greatest drawbacks to Russia's free development. It makes it impossible for her government to listen to the unceasing demands of Russia's enlightened classes—numerically small but very important—for decentralisation, for the greater powers of the *zemstvo*,—in other words, for greater local and provincial self-government. Conversely, the system at present followed by the national government renders a policy of outward successes and of spurious splendour and military glory almost a necessity, in order thereby to keep a firm rein on the masses, cowed by the apparent strength of this very government, but probably unreliable in the event of serious defeat.

It has been customary to present the Russian *tchin* (bureaucracy) as an immense and wholly reliable army at the bidding of the central government. Once this was the case, but it is true no longer. Russia's bureaucracy has swollen to such proportions, has of necessity admitted within its ranks such heterogeneous elements and is in large part located so far away from the direct influence of the central government, that to-day its one-time characteristic feature of thorough solidarity has been lost. Elsewhere this topic is treated of more at length. Here it will suffice to say that during the past fifteen years evidences have become more and more apparent that no small percentage of Russia's officialdom has grown to identify itself more with the interests and views of the masses than with those of the central government whose main prop these same officials are supposed to be. Nevertheless, it would be going too far to assume that a radical change in the traditional administrative system of Russia is probable within the near future, except in case Russia meets with very serious reverses in her external policy, such, for instance, as a crushing defeat by Japan. That, there is every reason to believe, would prove a signal blessing in disguise, leading to thorough internal reforms. At present the cancer of dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions is gnawing on and on throughout Russia, having seized the entire middle class, the larger portion of the nobility, the small landholders, a considerable percentage of the *tchin*, and even

vast numbers of her phenomenally patient peasantry. The voices heard in Russia in accusation of the prevailing bureaucratic and centralising system are becoming louder and louder, and many of them can be heard even in the immediate entourage of the Czar. The charge is made that Russia proper is becoming poorer every year, that the burden of taxation is crushing out every spark of aspiration, and that the omnipotence of officialdom is steadily increasing. Indeed it is not too much to say that every indication points to an eventual bitter struggle between the adherents of the present system and the advocates of a more rational and natural one. The central government has been shaping its course for years to meet this struggle, and what its outcome will be in the end no prophet at present can tell.

There are close observers of Russian conditions who maintain that the Russian people are ethnologically incapable of being governed by any other system than the present one. So shrewd a judge as the French writer and philosopher, Gobineau, claims this. Indeed, there are many things in the Russian national character which seem to uphold such a theory. One of the most distressing features of the case is the fact that Russians so far, whenever they have obtained in any measure and number independence and self-government, have been unable to use these boons wisely. In some respects, for instance, M. de Witte has proven himself one of the ablest statesmen Russia has ever had, and certainly he has enjoyed in Russian public life

every facility for many years past of fathoming the Russian national character. And M. de Witte in a memorial to Nicholas II., written in 1901, makes the distinct claim that the people are so devoid of initiative, that this defect of their character is racially so inherent, as to render them incapable of ever attaining of their own accord and by their own means to any larger measure of liberty, diligence, or sense of duty and order. Nothing but the lash, he asserts, will keep them in the middle of the road.

However that may be, it seems quite certain that the Russian of to-day, that is, the Russian ethnologically considered, is not and cannot be the motive and directive power in the vast empire which bears his name. Against the eighty-six millions of Russians we find some forty-four millions of tribes and populations other than Russian within the empire. In many respects it is this non-Russian element which is superior to the Russian himself, certainly in all essentials which go to make a strong and progressive people. Even such retrograde populations as the Tartar and Armenian make, as a rule, more prosperous subjects and better administrators than he. The Finns, the Baltic Germans, the Letts, the Lithuanians, the Poles, and, with a certain reservation, the Jews (that is whenever they have been given an opportunity, which has been rarely the case) — all of them, when competing on even terms, prove themselves stronger in the struggle for existence, on the same ground, than the Russians proper. What

indeed would Russia be were it not for her statesmen, administrators, generals, engineers, agriculturists, and industrial leaders of non-Russian blood! The whole of modern Russian history on almost every page teems with names of foreign origin. And this enormous influence of non-Russians in guiding the nation's destinies has continued to this day. The two men who have been the chief advisers of Nicholas II. are both of Baltic German origin—De Witte and De Plehve. Even Alexander III., father of the present ruler, intensely Old-Russian in spirit and motives as he was, found it a sheer impossibility to govern Russia by the Russians. He, like all his predecessors since Peter the Great, saw himself compelled to use as his right-hand men persons of non-Russian extraction.

The present Russian dynasty itself is not Russian in blood. It began with the extinction of the Muscovite rulers of Rurik's lineage. The great Peter took for wife a Baltic German woman of low extraction, though heroic in mind and character. Since then the admixture of German blood in the veins of the czars, continuing uninterruptedly for two centuries, has practically changed the line of Russian rulers into a foreign one. Indeed, to cast even a hasty glance at modern Russian history is to see that the ruling Russian dynasty is anything but typically Russian in character, looks, and sympathies. How else, indeed, could it have been possible that the very language of the nation, Russian, has been tabooed at the court of St. Petersburg for one

hundred and fifty years past! The Russian nobility even to-day, when amongst themselves, prefer to speak either French or German. Russian is looked upon by them as a barbarous tongue, only "fit to be spoken to servants."

Yet there has come a noticeable change within the past twenty years. The growth of the Panslavic Party has sharpened the sense of national pride within certain circles. As in other countries that could be named, a sickly and sentimental feeling of jingoism has been steadily growing, and frequently of late years it has found vent in certain organs of the Russian press. "Russia for the Russians" has become the motto. But how carry this out? When we take into consideration the actual facts outlined above—the apparent inability of the Russian to govern either himself or others, and his tendency to rely on the initiative of foreigners to lead his country into the path of progress; the failure of the Panslavic and Old Russian parties to accomplish anything of lasting benefit to the nation; the circumstance that the only great achievement due to the impetus of the Russian masses and of the Russian mind was the war of 1876 to 1878 against Turkey, accomplishing nothing and loading the country with a new enormous debt; the further fact that native Russia is corrupt to its very marrow-bones—what would "Russia for the Russians" mean, if it were possible to carry it out, but the sliding of the whole country into the slough of despond?

Certainly it is a unique anomaly that the largest empire of the world depends, for the little progress that is being wrought there, not on the overwhelming majority of its population,—that majority which has amalgamated more or less successfully the minority of forty-four millions, made up of fragments of populations speaking two hundred different languages and dialects, and following every conceivable form of worship, from the rudest pagan to the most elevated type of Christianity,—but on its elements of foreign blood. Yet such is the undeniable if curious fact. And up to this hour the aroused national spirit has only intensified the old curse imported into the country by Peter the Great, the outward make-believe, the passionate desire to "pretend" in dealings with Western nations, to convince them of the military, intellectual, and moral equality of Russia. This pretence has not held water at every critical juncture in Russia's modern history. The barbarian has always cropped out. But this craving for the ascendancy of the purely Russian element within Russia, natural enough as it is on the surface, has other and even more serious consequences in its wake.

The eighty-six millions of Russians will no longer permit a small minority of German, Polish, French, or Swiss blood to rule them, and in order to prove their ability to take, themselves, the dominant position they have to fall back on their old device of make-believe, what the Chinaman calls "saving one's face," by pre-

tending to qualities and virtues which in reality they do not possess. With this recent current in national sentiment every Russian ruler and every member of the higher spheres of government has to reckon. In this way it has come about that the Russian is no longer lifted to the higher level of his rulers of foreign blood, but that he drags them down to his lower level. In the matter of heightening the civilisatory level of the country Russia has now come to a dead stop, and this is owing to the curious condition of affairs pointed out. If these conditions were to continue permanently the doom of Russia would indeed be sealed. But it is not necessary to suppose that. The Russian soul, save in one or two particulars, is in constant fluctuation, and the prevailing current of narrow nationalism will pass, as so many others have passed there.

To sum up: We see an immense empire, a goodly portion of it situated within the temperate zone and rich in natural resources, though for the larger part lying fallow for lack of capital and enterprise. Its enormous extent, deficient in means of communication, is both a source of strength and weakness as a world power. Its population is by no means homogeneous. One-third of the whole does not even speak Russian, and both religious and race strife are rampant. This may be taken as another element of weakness in her armour. As a whole, the Russian lacks individual enterprise and steadiness of energy. Russia's finances will be considered under another head. Here it is but

necessary to say that they are thoroughly unsound; that, in fact, she is almost entirely dependent on foreign nations for the money needed to maintain her national household; that great undertakings, such as railroads, large industrial establishments, agricultural machinery, etc., are carried out entirely with foreign funds and largely by foreign brains; and that Russia, whenever she wishes to engage on any serious task, such as, for instance, a war, must rely on the purses of her political and commercial rivals. Surely a humiliating position for a nation that aims at subduing the whole of Asia! In the matter of coasts and ocean borders nature has been most unkind to her. That fact, indeed, is nearly always pleaded in excuse for Russia's unappeased appetite for new conquests. An ice-free harbour on the Pacific, forsooth! She has her ice-free harbour now, —that is, if the Japanese will let her keep it. But whether or no, it is a great deal more than an ice-free harbour that Russia needs if she would stand on an equal footing with other world powers.

Russia is invulnerable only in one narrow, definite sense—in the sense of her unwieldiness.

**Note by the Bay View Reading Club**

When this book was selected for the Bay View Reading Club's course on Russia and Japan, it was the judgment of the management that Chapter III on Russian Finance, and Chapter XI on Russian Bureaucracy, beginning on page 254, would not be of special interest to most of our members. In the lesson assignments, therefore, these chapters will be passed over. They are retained in the book for the benefit of any who may desire to make a study of the subjects.

## CHAPTER III

### RUSSIAN FINANCES

**The Great Difficulty of Obtaining Reliable Figures for Russia's Actual Financial Condition—Paucity of Capital in the Country and Reasons Therefor — Survival of Obsolete Trading Methods—National Finances Begin with Peter the Great's Reforms—A Fluctuating Currency—Within the Past Seventeen Years Russia's Avowed National Debt has Increased by Over Two Billions—The All-Important Rôle of the Foreign Creditor—Wishnegradsky's Mercantilism—Witte Follows in his Footsteps—A Vast Increase in Exports is Brought about by Artificial Means—The Peasant and Landowner, Forming Ninety Per Cent. of the Total Population, Being the Sufferers—Witte's Methods Shown in Detail—Industrial Development of the Country — The French Alliance Systematically Utilised — The French Creditor now Averse to Further Loans—A Government Monopoly System—Constant Difficulty of Maintaining the Gold Standard—The "Gold Tribute"—Russia's Railroads do Not Pay — Reasons for This — The Liquor Monopoly—Facts and Figures Proving the Unsoundness of Russia's Finances**

IN dealing with Russian finances in such a manner that a comprehensive and fairly accurate impression may be conveyed, more obstacles are to be overcome than would be the case with those of any other modern country. For the searcher after truth has to encounter not only a paucity of reliable material, but

he is hampered by the conflicting official reports emanating from the Russian government itself. Outside of that country these conditions are, as a rule, little understood. It is the case, however,—though one runs counter to popular conceptions in asserting it,—that the various departments of the Russian government are practically independent of each other, and that each head while in power does pretty much as he pleases, not only in his administrative policy, in his appointments, and in the degree of enforcing or not enforcing existing laws, but even in the matter of budget schedules, memorials to the Czar, and in official reports. Even in that particular Russia is an exceptional country. Thus it comes about that complete reliance cannot be placed upon such reports. Frequently they are got up for the very purpose of mystifying the unwary, a category from which not even the minister's imperial master is excluded, and which by all means includes the foreign creditors or would-be creditors of Russia.

It requires, therefore, considerable caution to extract from Russian official reports anything approximating absolute truth. It requires comparison not only with previous reports by the same member of the Russian cabinet, but with those of his predecessors and his colleagues in the existing cabinet. And even then many things appearing in these official documents must be taken with a very large grain of salt. However, while making no claim for absolute reliability of every detail

enumerated in this chapter, it may fairly be claimed for it that it comes about as near to the actual facts as circumstances will permit.

In the Russia of olden days the rulers of Muscovy were living like hereditary lords upon their ancestral estates. The dues which they received from all sorts of ware, the commercial monopolies which they granted, all went into the purse of the Czar to defray therefrom his personal expenses, and the people, as such, derived no benefit. Only with Peter the Great, with the European customs and ideas introduced by him, did financiering enter Russia. But even Peter managed for the most part to conduct the national household by means of taxes and dues paid in kind, in men and products of the country, and in this archaic way he carried out his reform measures and waged his wars. In money the entire Russian budget amounted only to three million roubles during the earlier part of his reign, an amount which towards the end rose to ten millions. Nevertheless his craze for sudden reforms was very expensive for the country. Russian historians tell us that between 1678 and 1710 the number of tax-paying estates diminished by twenty per cent. One-fifth of the entire population had been killed by his wars or driven out of the country by his reforms.

The "divine" Catherine played her conspicuous part on the stage of world politics at an annual expense to the Russian nation of about sixty-five million roubles, and even of that relatively small sum she could afford

on one occasion to lay out a matter of seven millions in purchasing a rare collection of cameos. Nearly all of this went for the court and army; the country and the people saw nothing of it. In 1734 the administration of the whole empire, stretching even at that time from Riga on the Baltic across the steppes of European Russia, and then through the whole of Northern Asia to the shores of the Pacific, involved to the state an expenditure of but 181,000 roubles in money. The old conditions of barter survived in the interior; even to-day they still exist to a surprising extent in the rural communities and on the estates of the nobles. Rent even to-day is hardly ever paid in money by peasant to noble; neither are wages paid in money by the noble to the peasant.

The employment of money as a mode of payment dates on a larger scale only since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Up to that time about ninety-five per cent. of the total population were living in the country from the produce of the soil or from domestic industry. Industrial products, more particularly those of foreign make, were used only at the court of the Czar, by the army, the navy, and a comparatively small fraction of the nobility. This, of course, applies only to Russia proper, not to the recently acquired provinces on Russia's western frontier.

Thus things proceeded for about two hundred years. Ostermann, one of the shrewdest of Russian ministers, made a fairly successful attempt to increase the coun-

try's sea trade, but even in 1742 this amounted to only eight million roubles. When Catherine ascended the throne Russia's foreign trade had risen to twenty-one millions, and at her death, 1796, it amounted to 109 millions. The entire revenues of the national government in that year are given at 68,750,000 roubles; out of that sum not only the whole court led a luxurious life, but an army of 593,000 men was supported. At that time there was only copper currency in the country, and silver had to be bought at a discount of eighty per cent.

Then came the Napoleonic era, and this period of Russian glory and of many victories brought to the Russian people nothing but misery. The world policy of Alexander I. increased the national debt by more than a billion roubles. In 1816, after Napoleon's final departure for St. Helena, Russia's army still swallowed 234 million roubles. But trade was progressing; by 1817 there was a balance in Russia's favour of thirty-two millions. The national budget showed an excess of revenues of 414 millions, although this means depreciated paper currency, so-called "assignates." Russia's debt was ill-founded and as ill-funded, the interest being payable in gold to the foreign creditors, involving an enormous loss.

The Crimean War threw back Russia's young credit to the old low level. But with the ascension of Alexander II., during the brief era of reforms inaugurated by him between 1861–1864, Russian credit was once

more in the ascendant. This credit was utilised to the full. Railroads were built with foreign capital, a beginning of industrial development was marked, and then the Turkish War of 1877 broke out. All this, of course, required large sums. In Russia itself there was not then, and there is not now, much capital, owing to retrograde conditions. Within twenty-five years Russia contracted foreign loans to the tune of one and one-half billions in gold. Despite the Siberian gold mines the year 1887 saw only 281 millions in gold in her national treasury. Such a reserve was absolutely required every year to enable Russia to pay the interest on her foreign debt in specie.

In that year, 1887, Wishnegradsky became finance minister. The son of an humble Russian pope (Orthodox priest), this man had risen to prominence by his thoroughly un-Russian energy and boldness. From his advent dates Russia's modern financial system. He inaugurated a financial policy having for its aim the exploitation of all the national material forces for fiscal purposes; this system at present seems to have attained its zenith.

European Russia at that time had railroads, telegraphs, postal facilities, and though all these means of communication were far behind similar ones in countries to the west, they enabled the central administration in St. Petersburg to keep in constant touch with its instruments, the provincial officials. To-day communication of this kind reaches as far as Manchuria.

In pre-railroad days the Russian administration had been a network of corruption and bribery. Since Wishnegradsky organised the new financial system his department has improved greatly. It is that in which the greatest "pickings" were to be had, and even today, despite decided improvement, conditions still prevail which in Europe or this country would not be tolerated for a moment. However, everything is relative, and relatively speaking the Russian department of finances is now rather clean.

A number of the important statements in the following part of this chapter are taken on the authority of M. de Witte's former chief assistant in the department of finance, M. Schwanebach, a member of the imperial council.

Wishnegradsky in 1887 found a national debt of four and one-half billion roubles, eating up annually 262 millions in interest. He also found 281 millions in gold reserve. During a long period of growth in the Russian national debt, since the end of the sixties, one country after another had adopted the gold standard. It was realised that Russia, if she would not fall grievously behind, would have ultimately to adopt the same standard. From 1862 to 1887 Russia's balance of trade was the wrong way. About fifty to sixty millions in gold flowed out of the country in excess of its gold returns. From 1881, since the increase in duties by sixty per cent., the balance began to be in her favour, but not sufficiently to maintain her gold reserve intact.

Wishnegradsky began to apply the tax screw. In that way he obtained an additional revenue of fifty million roubles. He also rigorously enforced payment of delinquent taxes, always one of the distressing features of Russian finances. In that way he compelled the Russian peasant to sell his surplus of agricultural produce in the fall; often, too, the peasant had to sell more than he could afford in order to make up the amount of his taxes. That increased very naturally the export figures. The percentage of the harvest exported to neighbouring countries rose during his administration from fifteen to twenty-two per cent. Cereals had always played a great part in Russia's exports, but under Wishnegradsky they first assumed that degree of importance which they have since maintained. The holders of estates, nobles most of them, were likewise encouraged to export, a thing made easy by the growing burden of their own debts. Wishnegradsky secured special railroad tariffs, and introduced a differential tariff for cereals, so that the latter could be carried at a profit from the interior to the export harbours on the Baltic, chiefly Libau, Reval, and Riga. In other words, he created a premium for cereal exports, and he succeeded with it. In the same successful manner he dammed the imports; he raised in 1887 the duties on coal, iron, tea, and other necessaries, and in 1890 he once more raised the duties by a general average of twenty per cent. In 1891 he put a prohibitive duty on a great many articles which the nascent Russian industry was producing.

By measures such as these he contrived to raise the Russian exports in cereals from 312 million pood to 442 million pood yearly. The balance of trade rose from 66 to 307 million roubles in Russia's favour. He likewise converted a large part of the Russian foreign debt from gold to paper interest. Nevertheless, even during his administration, the national debt itself rose.

Viewed purely financially Wishnegradsky's success was brilliant. The chronic deficit in the budget disappeared; he established an average annual surplus of 41½ million roubles. He was enabled to pay the interest on the foreign debt without straining at all the national finances. During his term, 1887–1893, the gold reserve rose rapidly, from 281 to 782 millions. Viewed from the point of national economy the tale was different; for the forcing of the exports produced unhealthy conditions in agriculture, and the additional taxes were severely felt by an impoverished peasantry. S. Golovine, a noted Russian economist, puts a large part of the blame for the present desperate condition of Russian agriculture on the shoulders of Wishnegradsky.

And indeed the experience of the year 1891 seems to bear him out. There was a deficient crop that year, and famine stalked through the land. The Russian *moujiks* (peasants), with their crops sold for taxes and with absolutely no reserve in either savings or surplus foodstuffs, were starving by the million. The government had to sacrifice 162 millions to feed them, and

export sank considerably in 1892. In any event, however, Russian national finances could now bear better such extraordinary expenditures and losses. In the following year the rising figures for export set in once more, and when Wishnegradsky left office his successor, De Witte, found the state treasury in a healthy condition.

The new finance minister found a national debt amounting to 4571 millions, and interest on this of 241½ millions. A part of the 229 millions which Wishnegradsky had added to the national debt had been secured in foreign parts, and had, therefore, to be redeemed and paid interest on in gold. The growing demand in Russia for every kind of machinery (particularly agricultural) and other foreign industrial products, had also to be met by gold payments. Despite the fact that the annual balance of trade had been for years, save in the famine year of 1891, largely in Russia's favour, the country was threatened with the danger of paying out in gold more than the amount of the yellow metal coming in; and if no vigorous check was interposed, the national finances would easily revert to former deplorable conditions.

The export of cereals, as pointed out before, had been pushed by Wishnegradsky to the utmost. When the deficient crop and the famine of 1891 overtook the country, the whip of the pitiless tax collector was still raised over the head of the pauperised peasant. The United States at that time came to the aid of the starv-

ing, sending as a free gift to the Baltic harbours, for distribution through the interior famine districts, large vessels laden with corn. Nevertheless, there had been large and growing tax delinquencies. These amounted in 1893, so far as the peasantry were concerned, to 119⅓ million roubles for the forty-six "governments" (large districts or provinces) mostly affected. This could only be interpreted as a most ominous indication of the decreasing ability of the rural population to pay their taxes, and this rural population was more than ninety per cent. of the whole in the districts spoken of, that is, the very heart of Russia.

The immense foreign debt of Russia was another great evil. This fact had long ago been recognised by Russian statesmen. One of the best of her financiers, Count Cancrin, during his financial administration, 1823–1844, had pointed this out very clearly. In an illuminating memorial to his imperial master, Count Cancrin had stated "that the state should fall back on foreign loans only in cases of the most urgent need." But all theoretical recognition of these dangers was futile in preventing the constant increase of Russia's foreign debt, because of these two facts: the aggressive and expansive policy of Russia, necessitating large armies and enormous war expense, and the great lack of mobile capital in the country itself.

M. de Witte saw these things very clearly. He coincided in principle with his predecessor's financial scheme of exploiting the productive energies of the

country for fiscal purposes. But his programme went much farther in this direction, as we shall see. Meanwhile he recognised that, to obtain taxes enough for his purposes of industrially developing Russia, it became necessary to increase the sources of productivity. It was his intention to raise Russia to the heights of a European civilised state. And, in true Russian fashion, this intention of his was to be realised at once, without delay, without the patient, slow, organic work which the case really demanded.

One can easily understand Witte in this. Of humble birth, of German blood, he was entirely without those powerful connections at court which high lineage and tradition would have secured for him. He had made his way up the steep ladder of the Russian *tchin* by the sheer force of his unusual abilities and by his phenomenal energy and capacity for hard work. As an administrator there has perhaps not been his equal in Russian internal history. His touch with European thought and European industrial methods was even more intimate than his knowledge of Russia and the Russians. To hold himself on that eminence to which he had climbed, to preserve the favour and confidence of his master and the nation, he had to do things in a hurry. Sweeping reforms, such as those in the early sixties, were not to be dreamed of. That he saw clearly. To serve his ambition and his country alike, to the best of his ability, he was compelled to act with despatch, to bring about immediate results. Only then

would the native Russian element, the powerful Old-Russian party, tolerate or support him in his far-sighted schemes. National Russian pride would admit of no delay, would not patiently await the slow fruits of more conservative yet more lasting measures than those Witte had to adopt.

Both by his writings for various publications in Russia and Germany, and by word of mouth it results quite clearly that the above considerations were the guiding ones with M. de Witte. He knew that to increase the productivity of agriculture in Russia by state help (the only really feasible way of putting Russia, a country having an agricultural population of ninety-five per cent.) on a permanently sound basis would at best be the work of many years. He also knew that a thorough agrarian reform could not be the task of the financial minister alone, but needed the sympathetic and energetic co-operation of his colleagues. Yet they were against such reforms; they even considered them harmful and irrealisable. The reason for this, again, was that every thorough agrarian reform in Russia, to accomplish permanent benefit, at once encounters grave questions of political principle, such as communal ownership and joint-tax responsibility, the whole-tax system, rural schools, and provincial self-government. All these questions were answered by Witte's colleagues in different ways.

Witte, therefore, at first centred his attention on the steady increase of Russia's gold reserve and on thereby

fixing the current value of the rouble, having in mind the adoption of the gold standard. He had at the time when he assumed charge of affairs some 581½ millions in gold in the fireproof cellars of the Russian state bank. Export began to increase. But it was rather slow work, in no way corresponding to Witte's wishes.

Thus M. de Witte plunged into a series of innovations. The currency question was regulated by him by purchase and sale of gold drafts. The taxes were increased by seventy millions yearly. The tariff war with Germany was ended by a commercial treaty. Loan after loan was placed with foreign nations.

Witte made himself absolute master of Russia's entire money business. He took not only the state bank completely under his wings, but he also brought all the private banks under his control. He secured for himself the right to depose directors of banks not in consonance with his ideas, to dismiss bank agents instantly, to close banks, and exchange houses similarly. He prohibited on pain of heavy fine all speculation in gold and gold values. He forced the private banks to leave entirely to him for a time all their foreign money business, drafts and checks going exclusively through the state bank. The state bank itself he compelled by the statute of 1894 henceforth to further Russian commerce less than Russian industry and the bourse operations of the minister. At the same time he began to increase the gold reserve.

At the beginning of 1896 Witte deemed the time ripe

for undertaking the first steps looking towards the adoption of the gold standard. By the terms of a special law issued at that time he commenced redeeming paper notes in gold, the gold reserve meanwhile having risen to 630 millions. To insure the permanent working of the gold reserve, Witte had, of course, to take care that the balance of trade would remain in Russia's favour. For Russia, as pointed out before, is very differently situated from countries like England, Germany, France, and of late the United States, in the matter of mobile capital, she being extremely poor in cash money, and being obliged besides, by reason of the gold interest on her foreign debt, to pay out regularly a large portion of her gold receipts into foreign hands. If England, for instance, is able to have (as she did in 1899) a balance of trade against her amounting to $750,000,000, she makes up for this by her ownership of foreign values. Russia has no such foreign values; indeed, she represents the exact opposite. And of her own industry, small as it was, a large portion of its earnings left again the confines of Russia in the shape of interest and dividends paid to foreign creditors and shareholders. This is what is popularly termed in Russia the gold tribute, and which all Russian economists feel as one of the greatest curses from which their country suffers. To make up for all these disadvantages only one way was left to Russia and Witte, namely, to see to it that there was always a large excess of exports over imports.

In his budget report for 1898, Witte gives expression to his confidence in Russia's elasticity by saying that he had engaged in his somewhat risky operations "in the firm faith in the steady development of Russia's productive forces."

In the meantime the export trade fluctuated a good deal. The balance of trade in Russia's favour sank in 1896 to less than one hundred millions, and for the period of 1893–1898 it averaged only 143 millions.

Witte had set himself, as one of his chief tasks, the rapid industrial development of the country. By that he meant to stop or at least greatly diminish the constant outflow of many millions of gold in payment of foreign-made rails and rolling stock, agricultural and industrial machinery, chemicals, and other things. He intended to create a native industry which would give wages to the peasant during his enforced idleness throughout the long Russian winter, and fortunes to the enterprising owners of factories. In this he also had in view the prospect of winning for the state new taxable property. To carry out his ideas he needed, however, much money, only to be obtained in foreign parts, money with which to bring the railroads under the ownership of the government, to maintain the gold standard, and to put the Russian nobility, sadly impoverished, and the pauperised peasantry again on a flourishing basis. This in large outlines was and is Witte's financial policy. He had, therefore, to abandon Wishnegradsky's cautious reserve and to pile loan upon loan.

The Dual Alliance came to Witte's aid. It opened for Russia the great money market of France. Indeed, from his particular point of view, the purely financial one, Russia could not have had a better ally. The French are a saving nation. Untold millions were hidden away, throughout the length and breadth of rural France, in the proverbial stocking of the French peasant and small *rentier*. To invest these immense sums in transoceanic enterprises, as England does, is not to the prudent Frenchman's taste. But to loan his money, at higher interest than safe investments at home would have brought him, to the political ally, the dear Russian, the only friend left to *belle France* in the whole of Europe, seemed to him not only a profitable, but still more a patriotic undertaking. Thus it was that French capital has gone into Russian hands since 1893 to the tune of thousands of millions. How large these sums really are, it is impossible to tell, since no reliable data exist. But it is known that not only loan after loan of the Russian government has been placed in France, but that French gold (and likewise Belgian to an almost incredible extent) has privately been fructifying the young Russian industry. As an illustration of this the fact will serve that French and Belgian capital to the amount of 1650 million francs (over $300,000,000) has been invested in Russian steel and iron works alone. By such means as these it was unavoidable that Russia, and particularly Witte, strengthened the political and economical hold on France. It is claimed that

the totality of French money which has gone in one form or another to Russia during the past eleven years amounts to about $1,700,000,000.

A certain amount of recklessness in dealing with such enormous sums obtained from foreign creditors can be distinctly traced in M. de Witte's operations. They are characterised more by boldness and ingenuity than by prudence. It is but necessary to study his own budget reports to become convinced of this. In them he declares frankly, again and again, that this foreign capital is meant to increase Russia's productivity, and that as to the rest he cares very little what ultimately becomes of it. There is not a word said as to a plan of his own, as to the probability or even possibility of ever repaying these gigantic sums.

And why should he not be frank? What palpable risk does Russia run in the matter? Russia is not a farm, an estate, or even a railroad that could be foreclosed on a mortgage. There is no tribunal, not even the one at The Hague, which could compel Russia to pay her debts. Should the time come that Russia was unable to pay the interest or the sinking fund on her sixty thousand verst (about forty-two thousand miles) of railroads, built entirely with foreign capital, it would indeed be a very difficult task to force payment. And it is almost as difficult seriously to blame a Russian Minister for having utilised to the full the confidence of foreign capitalists in a magical development of

Russian economical conditions, a confidence based on scarcely any tangible facts.

Not a single year has gone since M. de Witte assumed charge of Russia's finances without his having placed at least one foreign loan. On January 1, 1900, he had contrived to increase the Russian national debt by 1579 million roubles. It had grown to 6150 millions, requiring annual interest and sinking fund of 292 millions. He also began to operate on a large scale in Russian values, especially in those payable in gold, such as railroad bonds, shares of the Agrarian Bank for the Nobility, and other securities. He sold them in foreign parts. Within six years, of the two kinds of securities spoken of, nine-tenths went over the frontier, and in 1900 the total of Russian securities in foreign hands amounted to 3½ billions of roubles, requiring 140 millions in interest. But all this had brought much gold into the country. In Russia itself had remained only those loans redeemable in roubles of the new currency. Of the latter there were then about four billions, and Russians held 2700 millions of it; of the four-percents. some 1503 millions are held by Russians.

A third source of revenue began to flow for Witte since 1895 in the rapidly developing industry, promoted by him in every possible way. From the capitalistic Western countries gold was pouring into Russia for all sorts of industrial enterprises, at the very least at the rate of one hundred million roubles yearly.

The Siberian gold mines yielded the Russian govern-

ment a matter of 297 millions from 1893 to 1898. During the same period Russia's gold reserve increased by 637 millions, and on January 1, 1897, it had attained a height of 1247 millions. The old paper roubles were redeemed at the ratio of 1½ paper rouble to one rouble in gold. All Russia was amazed. The living generation had never seen any actual Russian imperials, while very old people had seen such gold pieces only as a great rarity. And now gold was to be had for the mere asking. Witte's fame grew to gigantic heights —the innocent *moujik* thought him a past master in the black art. But all the time the gold reserve rose. On January 1, 1899, there were 1420 millions of it in the national treasury, while banks outside Russia had deposited with them another 180 millions of Russian fiscal gold, together a gold surplus of 1600 millions. Within ten years Russia had reached her goal: she had attained the level of Western financiering. Financially, too, it seemed she had become a great power. She had broken with her humiliating dependence upon the fluctuations of foreign money markets. It looked as if she was now to hold a position economically corresponding in some measure to her political one.

This at first seemed a rational conclusion. The facts and figures which M. de Witte very well understood how to manipulate, looked imposing. Not a few of the cool-headed moneyed men of Europe and America allowed their judgment to go astray by the glittering tinsel of Russia's financial reports. But it is worth

while to examine the underlying facts a little more closely, and a very different conclusion will be arrived at.

For one thing, it must not be forgotten that this apparent immense gold surplus consisted in reality of new debts; that the debts incurred had to pay interest and sinking fund, and that the gold rouble, swiftly as it had run into Russia, might as swiftly run out of it again, that is, as soon as the productivity of the nation should relax. True, Witte spent many wakeful hours to prevent the return of this gold whence it had come. He made it his object to increase production in Russia. Up to his time fully ninety per cent. of the total population had been engaged in tilling the soil. Russian export consisted of ninety per cent. of raw stuffs; eighty-five per cent. in 1893 was made up of agricultural products. As late as 1898, Witte said in one of his speeches that Russian agriculture produced scarcely any capital available for industrial purposes. And yet capital was needed, and a great deal of it, to develop the country industrially and to make it more or less independent of that foreign industry which at this very time was making strenuous efforts everywhere to reach unheard-of heights, both in bulk and quality. Russia, he knew, was rich in natural resources; there is no lack of coal, iron, and petroleum. He now proposed to raise these treasures. His methods were skilful.

In 1894 he converted a billion of government bonds, held in Russia itself. Those bringing five per cent.

were redeemed and replaced by four-per-cents. This operation created amazement in a country where capital is so scarce that the private interest rate is still about ten per cent. With these new four-per-cents. Witte managed to withdraw not only the five-per-cents. but finally, also, the four per cent. gold bonds, selling them all in foreign money markets. The internal debt, five-sixths of it, was converted into a four per cent. irredeemable one. The capital thus liberated turned towards industrial enterprises; these promised higher returns. Much of it, too, was used for speculating purposes, and the bourse in St. Petersburg developed on parallel lines with the growth of stock companies. Witte had done what he wished to do. He drove the mobile capital of the country into Russia's new industries, and in so doing earned new revenues for the state.

With a lavish hand the finance minister scattered the money of the state to nourish industry. Numerous banks were founded and aided by the government; through them capital was advanced for industrial undertakings. Technical and commercial schools were established by the government and assisted financially. Foreign capital followed in this path with avidity. The same industrial fever which raged through adjoining Germany and in the United States had seized upon Russia. It flew across the somnolent Russian steppes, as it had flown through countries industrially more advanced. Between 1894 and 1899, 927 stock companies were organised, with a nominal capital of 1420

million roubles; the actual capital is estimated at between 560 and 600 millions. Of these companies 151 were wholly foreign, the remainder were more or less assisted by foreign capital. But the government itself did much more than this. The construction of new railroads, of naval vessels, and the financial assistance given the merchant marine, all furthered immensely the whole iron and steel industry and the establishment of factories and industrial works more or less related.

If the administration of Wishnegradsky had shown a strong tinge of commercialism, the one of M. de Witte became purely monopolistic. The whole railroad system in Russia passed under the control of the government. Within the ten years from 1892 to 1902 Witte expended a matter of 2252 million roubles in enlarging the state network of railroads. By 1897 some four billions of roubles, nearly all foreign capital, had been invested in state and private railroads. For these purposes Witte, by 1900, had enlarged the national debt by over a billion and had increased the "gold tribute" to the foreigner by forty millions yearly. On January 1, 1902, the budget report of Prince Hilkoff, the minister of railroads, mentioned the fact that the entire railroad system had attained a length of sixty thousand verst (about forty-two thousand miles),[1] of which the government roads represented two-thirds. But even the private roads were practically government ones, since

[1] Against 221,000 in the United States, less than half the size of Russia.

even as early as 1897 almost ninety-five per cent. of the capital invested in the railroads, private and state, had come from the national treasury. Since then the construction of the great Asiatic railroads,—especially those through Siberia and Manchuria,—and the purchase by the government of the Moscow-Arkhangel Railroad, have made the share of private capital in Russia's railroad system a minimal one.

It cannot be said that the Russian railroads, viewing them in their entirety, have been too expensive in their construction. Statements as to their cost per verst differ materially in various budgets and government reports. But taking even the highest statement (and probably the most reliable), that of Prince Hilkoff, the cost per verst is only 109,500 roubles. This compares very favourably with other countries. But these figures antedate the completion of the Siberian Railroad and its branches into Manchuria, and both of them have come enormously high. Expert opinion is to the effect that these new roads, costing about $750,000,000, could be duplicated for half that amount. This is due in large measure to the fact that in the building of these Far Asiatic roads Russian material and Russian labour have been employed much more extensively than in the building of the older roads. In other words, the excessive expense is an indirect outgrowth of Witte's pet programme, the extreme favouring of Russian industry. In another part of this book the proof for this will be given more in detail.

But do the Russian railroads at least pay? A definite answer to that question is rather difficult. Both Witte and Prince Hilkoff in this respect contradict each other in a number of their reports, and the figures published by each one of them are never the same in different reports. Allowance must be made for the peculiar position of Russia, and Witte himself as Russia's finance minister, depending as they do so much on the good opinion of foreign money markets. In one of Witte's official reports, for instance, published in French in his special organ, the *Bulletin Russe de Statistique Financière* for 1901, the minister figures out a net profit of four hundred million francs, or about 4½ per cent. on the invested capital. This report, it is almost superfluous to say, was intended specially for the consumption of Witte's French friends. It does not tally at all with other reports by him, and still less does it do so with the reports of Prince Hilkoff. In Witte's budget report for 1902, likewise intended largely for effect on foreign money markets, he still claims a "small net profit" for the Russian railroad system as a whole, although he admits a considerable deficit for the Siberian Road.

The most reliable, probably, of all the Russian official reports bearing on this matter is to be found in the detailed statement of the "Imperial Control" for 1900. In this the receipts from government and private roads are stated to be 374 millions, the expenditures 405 millions, leaving a deficit of thirty-one millions. This

deficit in the nature of things must have increased since, because the Siberian and Manchurian Railroads have been added, and they, as pointed out before, are operated at a very large loss.

Again, in that very same organ of Witte's referred to above, but at another time, occurs the following statement: "For the five years 1896–1900 the state suffered an annual loss of thirteen million roubles from the operation of the entire Russian railroad system."

These statements, while probably rather under than above the truth, come evidently much nearer the mark. All the available facts point to a considerable loss in the operation of Russia's roads. In European Russia the roadbed conditions are more favourable, but in Asiatic Russia these and the climatic conditions are extremely inauspicious. To that must be added the fact that thousands of miles of road must be protected by strong detachments of soldiers.

Meanwhile new loans are taken up and new roads are being built. The budget of 1902 shows for the railroads in ordinary expenditures 398,625,050 roubles, and extraordinary ones 165,658,493 roubles. This gives a total of 564,283,543 roubles, and of this for new railroads 170½ millions. To this must be added large sums contributed by private corporations for railroad building purposes. All these sums represent almost entirely capital borrowed of foreign nations. Passenger fares are low on Russian railroads; the "zone" system prevails there, as it does in Hungary. Fares have to

be low in order to attract patronage from the masses. Freight tariffs vary much; on some of the main lines and on certain goods and cereals, especially in the autumn, freight transportation is even lower than it is in the United States. On the other hand, freight charges are excessive on some of the lines. There is no uniform system of any kind. Taken as a whole, however, the returns paid per verst or mile by the Russian railroads remain far below those of either the United States, England, or Germany. There is no prospect, so far as eye can see, for Russia's railroads to pay within a decade or two. It must be remembered that even the central provinces of Russia are thinly populated when comparison is made with European countries, and that far more than half of Russia's railroad system runs through territory more sparsely settled than the western parts of the United States on either side of the Rockies.

If all these truths were generally recognised by thousands of small and large capitalists in France, Germany, the United States, Belgium, Holland, and other countries, it is safe to say that M. de Witte as a financial fisherman would not have been nearly so successful as he has been in drawing untold millions of solid gold from the pockets of an unwary public. The simple truth is, that Witte, financial genius of the highest order as he is popularly deemed, has for the past ten years been "bamboozling" the dear public in both hemispheres, holding out as a brilliant bait the alleged

"enormous productivity" of Russia. It may be—there is no telling—that Witte has been acting in the main in good faith, but on the face of the facts this assumption lacks plausibility. So shrewd a man as he, with the immense sources of information which he has to draw upon, cannot have remained blind during his long term of office to the actual condition of affairs. True, even now, after ten years of ceaseless disappointment in the matter of this much-vaunted "Russian productivity," he sticks to his text. The same phrase with which he has conjured billions out of the pockets of foreign capitalists, still occurs in his latest reports and budgets.

In 1895 M. de Witte took preparatory steps to realise his "spirit monopoly." The scheme has now been in operation for some years. In his budget report of 1899 he said that "the transformation of the system of levying the tax on spirits had not been dictated by the intention of thereby increasing the government revenues." However that may be, certain it is that this new monopolistic measure of his has had just that effect. The tax has increased a round 166 millions, rising from 322 to 488 millions (in 1901). For 1902 his revenues from the fiscal sale of vodka (for practically the whole tax is derived from this abominable potato spirit) have reached the sum of 497½ million roubles. This sum seems all the greater when it is borne in mind that it is derived almost entirely from the pauperised Russian peasant, a human being whose sole pleasure in life consists in seeking blissful oblivion of the harsh realities

of existence by as frequent overindulgence in this vile liquor as the state of his pocketbook will at all admit. Not only that, however, but strange to say, a thing almost unparalleled in Russian finances, the actual liquor revenues have every year exceeded governmental expectations; for 1901 the figure in excess was 31½ million roubles. Intentional or otherwise, the Russian governmental monopoly on the sale of spirituous and fermented liquor has had the effect of promoting drunkenness. The reasons for this deplorable fact, simple as they are, will be given in another chapter. In any event, the creator of this monopoly, M. de Witte, cannot justly take credit to himself, as he did in his earlier reports, for having introduced a social reform by confining the sale of liquor exclusively to government agents.

Besides the railroads and the liquor monopoly, Witte has utilised to the full other sources of revenue, such as the postal and telegraph department, fiscal forests and mines, crown estates, etc. From these various sources he has received forty per cent. of the ordinary receipts for use in his department (amounting to 693 millions in 1901), and for 1902 even fifty-seven per cent. (totalling 1031 millions). Russia in these respects, again, is an exceptional country. Fiscal property and fiscal administration of lands and institutions have taken there proportions unequalled in any other country, and reaching almost the ideals of state socialism.

The Russian State or Imperial Bank, to which since

1897 has been left entirely the issue of paper money and in which is concentrated the financial business of the empire, is wholly in the hands of the finance minister. Under his control, too, are the governmental savings banks of Russia, with their joint deposits of seven hundred millions. Private and peasant savings banks have been hampered purposely by him in their development, and individual deposits there must not exceed fifty roubles, thus forcing the depositor to have recourse to the institutions favoured by him.

Taking all these facts into consideration, it is seen that the powers in the hands of this one man, Witte, are well-nigh absolute, so far as financial manipulation of the vast empire's material resources is concerned.

Nevertheless, even Witte has been unable to make of Russia a financially potent country. To attain his ends he has killed the goose that lays the golden eggs —agriculture. This all-important circumstance will be shown in detail elsewhere in this book. But leaving that consideration aside in this present argument, the fact remains that, despite France's ardent political love for Russia, the time has come when even that nation's purse-strings are being drawn tighter. It did not even require the present war to show that. The fact became patent several years ago. A loan of 181 million roubles which Witte, in 1901, had vainly attempted to raise in Paris, he was forced to place in Germany and Holland. But to enable him to do so the mere guarantee of the Russian government did not suffice; he had to pledge

as security for this loan Russia's share of the war indemnity due from China on account of the Boxer rising, a thing which he had refused to do in Paris. A short while ago, just a few days after the outbreak of the war with Japan, it was reported from St. Petersburg that Witte was experiencing great difficulty in raising a war loan of only one hundred million roubles. These and other analogous facts show plainly enough for him who will see that Russia's borrowing powers with Western nations are on the wane. In the event of Russia's defeat in this present war her financial position will be nothing less than frightful. She would be utterly incapable of raising a large war indemnity, such as Japan doubtless would exact, except at unheard-of sacrifice. Her industry has practically collapsed even now. Foreign investors have lost in Russian industrial ventures during the past six or seven years sums aggregating six or seven hundred million roubles, and new foreign capital will be more cautious in the future. With every national resource strained to the last point under the strenuous financial policy of M. de Witte in times of deep peace, the delicate fabric which it has taken him ten years to erect will surely be shaken to its foundations or topple over during a long and costly war in Far Asia. This much indeed seems certain now. Will France and the other foreign creditors of Russia throw other billions of good money into the wreck?

Still, on the surface, and placing undue reliance on

the budget figures with which Russia's financial genius knows so well how to juggle, the financial conditions of the empire seem sound enough. Here are some of these figures: In the year 1889 (during Wishnegradsky's term) the national expenditures amounted to 867½ millions; in 1900 they had risen to 1889 millions; for 1902 they were 1,946,572,000 roubles. Within the six years of 1895–1900 the expenditures rose annually by 125 millions. These expenditures, gigantic as they seem for even so vast an empire, were considerably exceeded by the receipts. Almost every year a good-sized surplus was left in the national treasury, although on several occasions, such as famines and the like, this surplus was again eaten up. But more important is the fact that Witte was compelled to seek every year for a new loan in foreign countries. The one of 1901 (of 435 million francs) was raised with difficulty, and this was still more the case with subsequent ones. Not frankly avowed loans, but in their nature nothing else, were Witte's sales of railroad bonds. Quite recently he sold values of this description in Berlin to the amount of eighty million marks (about $20,000,000). Veiled loans of a similar nature have not figured in their true light in his published reports. In this respect, as in several other important ones, these official documents have all along been grossly misleading.

Taking the word of an eminent Russian economist, S. Golovine, for it—and in his writings he quotes the facts and figures in detail, and they have never been

disputed in Russia—the Russian nation in 1902 owed at home and to foreign countries and individual foreigners a gross total of 8½ billion roubles. Deducting from this mammoth sum private liabilities and retaining only those of the government, we see them stated by Witte himself in his budget report of 1902 at 6497 million roubles. Against it he places the safe fiscal investments at 4614 million roubles, leaving an unsecured debt of 1882 million roubles. But this statement of Witte's must not go unchallenged. It is contradicted by almost everybody and everything bearing on the case. Above all, these figures do not tally with previous ones given by himself. There seems to be a divergence of about 1331 millions. But this is merely one instance out of many showing the utter impossibility of making the facts square with Witte's official reports. For instance, by a simple piece of arithmetic it can be shown that the value placed by Witte on the state railroads, namely, 3551 million roubles, is not the correct one. The true value of any property does not alone consist in the capital invested, but in the profit which it brings. The Russian railroads yield not only no profit, but form annually a considerable net expense to the government. There are a number of other important items in the budget spoken of which are similarly reducible to intentional or unintentional error.

However, there are other significant facts in Russia's finances. The veiled loans in the shape of Russian railroad bonds sold in foreign cities were already hinted

at. It may show how large an item they alone form to mention that since 1894 such bonds to the amount of 900 million marks (about $220,000,000) were sold in Berlin. And these bonds, while not in the strict sense government paper, are nevertheless guaranteed by Russia, and increase, of course, the "gold tribute" paid to the foreigner; in their essence they are nothing but Russian government loans.

It is, therefore, still the old story, even under Witte: foreign and domestic loans; sale of securities in Paris or Berlin; drawing foreign capital into Russia for industrial enterprises. And with that, despite the apparently secure foundation of the gold standard, there are evidences that tell in the other direction. In his budget report of 1901 Witte admits that the gold reserve has decreased by almost twenty-five millions in 1899, and by seventy-four millions in 1900.

Export and import conditions since 1887 have maintained about the same ratio. Exports have averaged seven hundred millions and imports between five hundred and six hundred millions. Since the Russian industrial panic, or, more properly speaking, collapse, in 1898, there has come a great change in the nature of this import. Machinery especially, which before had been imported increasingly for industrial purposes, has diminished enormously. The chief item of export is still cereals, and this fact was not even vitiated by the famine of 1901. It is worth remarking that the official Russian figures for exports and imports have of late

years become very untrustworthy, no matter for what reason. But in any event the fact remains that Witte has only been able to maintain the export figures at their average height by official prodding and spurring. Thus, the budget report of 1902 admits that even in comparison with the very unfavourable average for the harvests of the preceding five years, the cereal production of the country in 1901 shows a decrease of 236 million pood. And yet in spite of the famine that ravaged the central provinces of Russia that year, there was an increase of over one hundred million pood in cereal exports. This remarkable fact is a striking illustration to the—agriculturally considered—suicidal policy of Russia in squeezing the last kopek out of the starving Russian peasant to produce the required taxes and incidentally to maintain the equilibrium between exports and imports.

For the faith in Russia's "productivity" which has guided foreign capitalists in their Russian investments, there are, of course, some reasons. That the natural resources of the country are great is indisputable; but they are by fully nine-tenths undeveloped, owing not alone to lack of capital, but also in goodly proportion to want of proper communication facilities. To become aware of that, it is but necessary to study the railroad map of Russia. It will be found that the main trunk lines—both the St. Petersburg-Moscow and the Trans-Siberian Railroads—have been built with scarcely any reference to the principal Russian and Siberian inland

cities. As a matter of fact, even those towns which are nominally connected by railroad lie as a rule miles away from the station. The great majority of Russian towns are distant from the railroads many miles, not infrequently fifty, a hundred, and even more. The highroads of the country, too, are for the most part in a fearful condition, morasses in early spring and quite impassable during part of the autumn.

Russia has, however, several sources of wealth which are rarely spoken of. The government itself owns immense property. Besides railroads, domanial estates, and mines in both Europe and Asia, the crown owns in forests alone 238 million dessyatines (a dessyatine being roughly 2½ acres); the latter in 1902 yielded some sixty-three million roubles. Besides, this forest property increases annually in value. The churches and convents of Russia harbour immense treasures in precious metals and gems. But, after all, while presenting an enormous intrinsic value, these treasures bring no return, and hence are of no real service to the country.

Together Wishnegradsky and Witte have extended Russia's financial resources, so far as taxes and revenues are concerned, to an unparalleled degree, but the question may be asked whether in so doing they have benefited the real interests of the nation, or whether they have not achieved in the long run vastly more harm than good. By the foregoing brief exposition of Russia's present financial system, the reader will be enabled to answer the question in a measure for himself. But

there are many native Russians, competent judges of the situation, who frankly declare that the economic condition of the people has not only not been bettered by the measures of the two financiers spoken of, but has been very considerably lowered. In a memorial published not long ago by M. Schwanebach, a member of the imperial council, and admittedly one of the sanest financial experts the empire possesses, that official says: "With the present condition of our national affairs our insufficiently developed industry cannot form that strong basis which, according to our money reforms, it ought to be."

M. de Witte is without doubt an extraordinary man, possessing qualities rare in Russia to an unusual degree. But even he is not the dictator of Russia; he is not all-powerful, but must reckon with other forces within the empire, and some of the most important ones are in opposition to him and have all along hindered him in his work. Wishnegradsky became a physical wreck during the six years of his administration. The same fate is probably in store for his successor. And who is to be his heir? There is no second Witte in Russia.

But aside from that consideration, much more important is the fact that even a Witte cannot enable the Russian people to jump at one bound across the space of several centuries which Western industrial nations required to climb painfully and slowly to their present industrial heights. Witte has used mechanical,

external means, has spurred and urged the Russian people to enter into active competition in industrial ways with the foremost nations of the globe. But in doing that he has, it is to be feared, increased the anæmia from which the heart of Russia suffers, and this despite the gold-filled national treasury. The enticing financial figures cannot disguise the fateful fact that the huge empire is in danger, even in grave danger, of an internal revolution, partly due to the exhaustion brought on by the very labours of Witte and Wishnegradsky. This will be shown more clearly in succeeding chapters.

## CHAPTER IV

### RISE AND COLLAPSE OF INDUSTRY

Russian Industry a Hothouse Product of her Two Latest Finance Ministers, Wishnegradsky and De Witte—Dwindling of her One-Time Peculiar Rural Industry, an Outgrowth of Serfdom—Russia Fulfils Not One of the Three Main Conditions of a Successful Modern Industry—Up to a Few Years Ago Russia's Captains of Industry Were All Foreigners—The Large Number of Russian Holidays a Great Drawback—The Modern *Moujik* is Half Rural and Half Industrial Labourer—Fiscalism the Key-Note to Witte's System — Complete Breakdown of Russia's Industry During the Last Couple of Years—Russia's Asiatic Market Insignificant—Foreign Capital Now Very Shy of Russian Investment—The True Industrial Salvation of Russia Concealed in the *Svietelka*—An Opportunity for a Broad-Gauge Statesman in Russia

MODERN industry in its development has been bound to three conditions, namely: a thorough training, previously obtained, in skilled handicraft; a sufficiency of mobile capital; and a numerous and intelligent middle class. We can trace the workings of this law very clearly during the past century. England, left after the Napoleonic era as the sole nation combining in the highest degree not only these three factors, but also the important additional one of supreme sea power, illustrates it strikingly. Her exceptional

position enabled her to gather enormous wealth, and this wealth she was able to utilise in industry. Germany was industrially greatly inferior to France until after the war of 1870–1871; the billion dollars which France had to pay in war indemnity furnished Germany with the means to develop her industry. The industrial rise of the United States is another proof of the validity of this economic law.

Which of the three factors enumerated above did Russia possess when Witte undertook to create a great Russian industry? The answer must be, emphatically, Not one of them.

Until the year of the emancipation of the serfs, 1861, Russia had no modern industry worth mentioning. There were, it is true, some small cloth factories in Moscow, Tula, St. Petersburg, and Odessa, some iron works, several textile works, etc. But they were entirely in foreign hands, on a small scale, and few in number. The only national industry existed in the rural districts; it was a cottage industry, bred and fostered by large estate owners to give their serfs employment during the long Russian winters. In its way this domestic peasant industry was considerable and varied. During the long period of serfdom a number of the powerful nobles, owning many thousands of serfs, had occasionally sent one or more of their human chattels possessing unusual intelligence to foreign parts, Germany, Holland, Belgium, or France, there to learn some particular line of skilled labour, and on

their return these men had acted as teachers on estates, thus introducing, one after the other, a number of handicrafts which in time were adopted by many thousands. The spinning and weaving of coarse silk, cloth, and cotton stuffs had been carried on in the *izbas* (huts) of the peasantry; hardware of the simpler type, all sorts of woodenware, wood-carving, and particularly the manufacture of *icons* (small pictures of Russian national saints, such as are to be met with in every Russian household)—all these things had been done by the Russian peasant for many years, in unequal degrees of workmanship and usually each line confined to certain provinces or districts. But, after all, this house industry was of the mediæval kind, and its relatively flourishing condition was largely due to exceptional circumstances. It is, however, also true that the Russian peasant possesses a certain mechanical talent. With his rude axe and saw, a hammer, and a knife he will fashion all sorts of agricultural tools, rowboats, sledges, and waggons, and many other things surprisingly well.

If the Russian government had been wise enough to make good use of these existing factors; if, building on these crude domestic industries, it had encouraged the rise of modern industry, taking advantage in each case of local conditions, a sound Russian industry, resting on a solid foundation of natural or acquired skill and taste, could have been produced in time. Unfortunately this was not done.

At the time of serf emancipation the Russian government gave to the peasantry 150,000,000 dessyatines of land to cultivate, obliging the former serf to pay for his little strip of land in instalments. But it held out no inducement to him, nor to any portion of the peasantry, to develop into a skilled and permanently employed factory hand. On the contrary, the unwise proceeding of the Russian government was the means of destroying this very cottage industry. True, the peasant was held to the soil by his ownership of it, but the small holdings did not even suffice for his modest needs, once the constantly rising taxes had been paid on them, and thus the peasants were forced to flock to the towns in winter in search of employment, underbidding one the other. The nobleman, no longer interested in the welfare of his former serfs, took no interest in maintaining or further developing the domestic peasant industry which formerly he had fostered. Thus the latter went to pieces, while at the same time urban industry failed to develop adequately because of a lack of capital. The government considered itself too poor to advance the capital necessary for large industrial enterprises.

Thus things went on in a haphazard way from 1861 to 1895. Some industrial cities had grown up, like Lodz, Vilna, Warsaw, and others, but they were on the frontier, in Poland, or the Baltic provinces, and therefore outside of Russia proper. The half-dozen or so of Russian interior cities having a population of

more than fifty thousand were not flourishing, and the small industry there remained in the hands of foreigners. The export trade done in them was likewise monopolised by Germans, Englishmen, Dutchmen, etc.

Foreign captains of industry in the frontier provinces, for the most part Germans or Belgians, were pressed by the Russian government to transpose their works to the interior, to the Ural, to Donetz, where iron and coal were in abundance. But these foreigners nearly always refused to do so, and this for sufficient reasons. In these interior provinces they could find no skilled labour, and to the absence of such labour, particularly engineers and higher-grade mechanics, it was due that if, for instance, a factory had been located on the banks of the Volga, it frequently had to shut down for weeks at a time until a new machinist had arrived from England, Germany, or Belgium, in place of one who had left or died; if a boiler needed repairs, weeks and sometimes months had to elapse before the necessary parts could be replaced or mended.

There were many other difficulties in the way, and perhaps the gravest was the large number of holidays which the Russian peasant is not only accustomed to, but is actually compelled to observe by an unwise government. While neighbouring Protestant or Catholic countries have only from fifty-eight to sixty-five non-labour days in the year, Orthodox Russia enjoins on her peasantry ninety-four of them. Even this large

number of holidays is considered insufficient by the Russian popes, and the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobyedonostseff, again and again has taken the Russian peasant to task for slighting the fête day of some national saint by labouring on it. It is stated that on an average the Russian peasant of to-day does no labour on 150 days out of the year. This, of course, means an enormous economic disadvantage.

And then, of course, the fact that the Russian peasant does not and cannot relinquish his rights to his little strip of land in his native commune when he becomes a workman in a town factory, entails likewise serious hindrances to his industrial advancement. The owner of one of the largest textile works in Moscow illustrated this once while in conversation with me. "You see, these men of mine can never be depended upon," said he. "There was one some years ago who was cleverer than the rest. Within a couple of years I trained him so that he could take charge of one of the engines. I raised his pay again and again, and then one fine day, when he had saved a matter of two or three hundred roubles, he came to me and asked permission to go home. In his village, of course, he played the part of the wealthy man, telling them stories about Moscow and its wonders. A year later Trifon turns up again, bows down to the very ground, and asks me to employ him once more. His money was gone. 'Batooshka, Carl Ivanovitch, old Trifon is here once more,' he says, and once more grovels at my feet.

During his absence changes have been made in the establishment; new machinery has been introduced, and old Trifon has to learn anew. In that way things go, and these men never become experts, and can never be relied upon for more than one winter season." The long and the short of it is simply that the Russian industrial worker is half peasant and half factory hand, and not very good as either.

The Russian government remained blind to all these deficiencies, no matter how often its attention was called to them. And then came Witte. He pointed to the example of Japan. There, too, a nation had suddenly acquired western methods of industry, and had entered successfully into competition with the most advanced nations. But the two cases are not parallel. Japan had had a very old industry, generally diffused and brought to the highest point, though in methods differing radically from western ones. Japan's population is one of the most diligent and ambitious on earth. Her agricultural conditions are sound, and none of the peculiar difficulties have confronted her in bringing about an industrial transformation from which Russia suffered and suffers. Besides, the lower-class Russian has not the nimble intellect and the quick powers of perception of the Japanese, nor has he the latter's bold initiative.

The difficulties pointed out above could, of course, not be overcome by Witte. But the capital at least could be obtained. In the preceding chapter it has been

shown how this was done. On March 13, 1894, M. de Witte made a speech in which he outlined his plans as follows:

> It is absolutely required to obtain capital in abundance and from many sources in order to aid our industry. It is a regrettable fact that we have an insufficiency of capital ourselves. . . . We are therefore obliged to utilise the wealth of capital which foreign nations possess, and which we can obtain at low rates. In this way we shorten the difficult period of learning industrial methods, and the process is simplified by the penetration into Russia of much technical knowledge.

That, then, was part of Witte's programme. He followed it up consistently. Enormous sums obtained by him from foreign creditors were launched into Russian industry. Above all, the network of national railroads was enlarged. Each new road called for large supplies of rails, rolling stock, coal, the construction of buildings, bridges, telegraphs, aqueducts, etc., and all these things necessitated the establishment of factories and workshops. Everywhere the iron industry forms the main pillar of modern industry; if that is flourishing it may be assumed that industry as a whole is doing well. It became Witte's task to promote the iron industry. The government erected big iron and steel works, car and locomotive works; and chemical, cement factories and others, followed. Industrial establishments rose almost overnight, most numerously in the centrally located provinces of Moscow and Vladimir, in the Donetz district, rich in ores and coal, at the large harbours, where foreign technicians and English coal could be

had cheaply, and in Poland, where German and Jewish capital and Silesian coal could be obtained.

Between 1894 and 1899 some 927 stock companies were chartered by the Russian government, their joint nominal capital being 1420 millions. Industrial production rose correspondingly; from 1877 to 1887 it increased almost fifty per cent. In 1887 it amounted to 802 millions, and by 1892 to 1010 millions. But within the five years of 1892–1897, under Witte, it climbed up to 1816 millions. Between 1894–1899 Witte expended in the construction of railroads and the manufacture of rolling stock a matter of 1273 millions. The two statistical facts are intimately connected with each other. A very large portion of Russia's new industry was and is to-day dependent on government railroad construction. The swelling of Russian industry produced, of course, new revenue—import duties, excise taxes, commercial dues, stamp duty, revenues from increased postal and telegraph facilities, etc. This gave an increased revenue of 236 millions.

After Witte had brought the railroad system under his control, the allied industries became likewise dependent on him, all the more as the banks had also to do his bidding. For some years these private factories, called into life by him, found remunerative employment. But when it was found that the railroads did not pay, Witte began to exert pressure on prices. He reduced the prices paid for rails, cars, etc., repeatedly, and a time came when private works yielded no longer any dividends.

In the matter of the liquor monopoly Witte has likewise acted similarly. The distilleries were and are entirely dependent on him. The government alone has the right to purchase liquor, and the prices paid for it are dictated by the state. By adopting uniform rates of payment the peculiar local conditions are ignored. Russian liquor, vodka, is made from potatoes. In Yaroslav potatoes bring twice the price they do in Grodno, yet the finished product, the liquor, is paid for at the same rate by the government. In this way it came about that thousands of the smaller distilleries situated on and connected with rural estates were ruined. Rural distilleries, in fact, were forced out of the business, and large distilleries in the towns enjoying good railroad facilities took their places, a fact bearing very hard on Russian agriculture.

Another great industry, that of making beet sugar, has grown up of late under governmental patronage. Since the beginning of the seventies Russian beet sugar has been protected by high duties. By the law of November 20, 1895, the whole industry was organised and centralised, and the trust resulting therefrom has been enabled to fix the inland price from year to year. The cultivation of the beet rapidly extended in the southern provinces, and Russian sugar gradually ousted the foreign product. This fact at first sight seems to tell in favour of agriculture. The promoting of Russia's sugar industry made it possible for a great number of large estates to cultivate their soil more intensely. The

government has made great profit out of sugar. The budget of 1902 shows the internal sugar tax to have yielded a matter of 69½ million roubles. But on close view it is found that the Russian consumer has to pay from three to four times the price for his sugar which the same sugar fetches in export. To compete in foreign parts the Russian sugar producer has to accept prices which do not pay expenses, and the deficiency is made up by the Russian consumer.

A specious presentation of the facts underlying Russian sugar production was published on March 16, 1902, in the official organ of the finance ministry, the *Financial Messenger*. The claim is advanced in it that the centralising of the whole production in 1895 had for its purpose the cheapening of sugar for the Russian consumer. But the fact is patent that the contrary result was attained by it. The paper hints at this fact, but throws the entire blame on the shoulders of those few sugar monopolists in Russia who influence "most unfavourably current prices."

The excessive protectionism of Wishnegradsky, culminating in the tariff of 1891, was abated somewhat by the Russo-German commercial treaty of January 1, 1894, but has remained nevertheless the reigning system. If in spite of that import rapidly grew, it was owing to the large needs of Russia in industrial and agricultural machinery. The revenue from imports increased for some years, but in 1898 came the industrial panic, and with it came a great diminution of import duties.

Witte carried out persistently his policy of befriending native industry. Now and then, when he thought Russian producers strong enough for the purpose, he did not hesitate to lay a prohibitive duty on special articles. Railroads and industrial establishments of every kind had to pledge themselves to support native industry by taking all articles made in Russia from the home producer, although in this they had to be satisfied with far inferior quality and higher prices.

A striking illustration in this connection is Russia's experience in the matter of railroad construction. Two eminent economic Russian authorities, Issayeff and Radzig, agree in the statement that during the twelve years 1884–1895 Russia bought 113 million pood of home-made rails for which she paid ninety-two million roubles more than she would have had to pay to English manufacturers for a better quality. Since 1895 enormous quantities of Russian rails were bought by the government in the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. They were found to be of deficient quality and of too light weight, and had to be later on replaced for a distance of thousands of miles by rails of a better quality. And for these Russian rails the government had to pay two roubles twenty-five kopeks the pood, whereas better English ones could have been bought at seventy kopeks the pood, that is, at less than one-third. Altogether, it is estimated that within the past twenty years the Russian government has paid something like

three hundred million roubles for Russian rails in excess of foreign ptices.

The above is a sample of the present achievements of Russian industry. Russian economists have cited many more.

The fact has often been spoken of that Russia has no trained industrial army of labourers, mechanics, and machinists. Nor had she, up to the time that Witte took hold of the helm, the trained intellect to lead such an army. Witte has been trying since to overcome at least the last-named obstacle. He set out to found technical and commercial schools and colleges. For model he took the German ones. There are at present four commercial colleges of high grade in Russia, and Trubnikoff, an authority in Russia, puts the number of lower technical and commercial schools at 190. They average twenty thousand pupils a year and the finance ministry spends on them (budget of 1902) a matter of 4½ million roubles. With all this the number of native technical talent remains very small, the great majority being of Polish or Baltic German nationality.

One of the main questions in this matter is: For whom is all this industrial output of Russia intended? Who is to be the consumer, the Russian or the foreigner?

Even Witte, optimist as he is, does not hope for any large number of consumers in Europe; he appreciates the undeniable facts that forbid such an assumption. There are, however, better prospects for Asia, and it is

to that enormous market that the Russian politician turns longingly. For the Asiatic market seems open to Russia from the Pacific to the shores of the Euphrates. How large is the Russian export to that part of the world? It is very small indeed. At the rise of Russian industry, in 1894, the entire export of Russian products of industry amounted to only 9½ millions; in the following year it had risen to 11 millions, and since then it averages annually about 28 millions. Of this Asia has altogether taken about two-thirds. But what is that in comparison to an annual production of 1800 millions in industrial values? The entire export figure on this class of goods is only 3.7 per cent. of the total Russian export. There remains, therefore, only the internal market for Russian industry. To what an extent is it capable of assimilating Russian industrial products?

A country of 130 million souls seems on the face of it a fine market. As pointed out before, large tracts of it are very fertile, and huge masses of cereals are produced, much of these going to foreign parts. From 1887 to 1891 an average of 442 million pood of breadstuffs was exported; from 1893 to 1897 this figure rose to 523 millions. These facts again looked quite promising for Russian industry. But by examining the facts more carefully, it will be seen that out of the whole 130 millions of Russians, there are only a beggarly two or three millions financially able to buy industrial products of the finer grades. The great bulk of the Russian nation is

living under conditions of what in western countries would be termed degrading poverty. Nor are political, social, and economic conditions such in the Russia of to-day as to promise a rapid change in this respect.

And yet, as we have seen, there has been a sudden rise and growth of Russian industry. The simple explanation lies in the fact that this industry, too, has been and is of a fiscal nature: The state, the government, are both the great producer and consumer. The construction of enormous railroads, an industry supplying all the needs in this connection, a liquor monopoly, and a sugar industry promoted in every way, the government exacting enormous revenue from all these things—this is the explanation of an economic phenomenon.

Large profits were made in Russian industrial enterprises during the first three years of the boom engineered by M. de Witte. On the St. Petersburg bourse many industrial shares were quoted at enormous figures, and some of the companies made dividends of sixty per cent. and over. But this lasted only a short time. With greater stringency in European money markets, the scarcity of capital was felt again in Russia. A few of the very largest industrial firms in Russia, first that of von Derwes, then Mamontoff, failed. Despite this, even in 1899, that is, right in the midst of the great industrial crisis, seventy new foreign corporations were formed in Russia. Altogether at the close of 1899, 146 foreign corporations, with a capital of 765 million

roubles (or 2075 million francs) had been chartered in Russia; of this sum France was engaged with 792 millions, Belgium with 734 millions, Germany with 261 millions, and England with 231 millions. Witte at that time was warning the public, both by word of mouth and by his press organs, to use more caution. But the fever which he himself had incited was now running its course. In public utterances he had given to understand that the great fiscal orders for railroad building would in the main cease with 1900. On October 31, 1899, he declared Russia's finances to be in a brilliant condition, sounder, he said, than those of France or England. This statement of his shows to what a dangerous extent he was overestimating the intrinsic strength of Russia and underestimating the dangers of the whole situation. Only a twelvemonth later came the great crash.

The excesses of governmental receipts over expenditures would even then have remained considerable. But unfortunately political complications arose, and they emptied his treasury. It had been his intention to construct the Trans-Siberian Railroad without incurring any new foreign debt, solely relying on the regular surplus of the annual government household. But the Boxer rising intervened in China. This cost him during 1900 the enormous sum of 334 million roubles. The Russian state credit suffered, and with it the credit of the private banks. Thus was precipitated the crash.

During 1900 all industrial values in Russia fell with rapidity, and early in October panic reigned at the St. Petersburg bourse. Even the Agrarian Banks lost an average of 70 roubles per share; Nobel petroleum shares depreciated by 144 roubles, and it was similar with nearly all paper negotiated on the exchange. A well-informed correspondent early in 1901 gave facts and figures showing the collapse of nearly all the Belgian companies in Russia. It was said their loss alone amounted to 734 million francs. From October, 1900, one firm after another went into bankruptcy. At the close of the year one of the leading St. Petersburg journals said in an annual financial review: "It will take many years to make us forget our losses. Of 282 bourse days 200 were marked by panicky conditions."

In an official report of the finance ministry the fact was mentioned that twenty-four million roubles had alone been lost by stopping the erection of factories and works for which under existing conditions there seemed no longer any need. Other works to the total value of two hundred million roubles had to be closed up permanently. Over four hundred factories dismissed all their hands and stopped operations. In the Donetz district twenty-five out of fifty-seven blast furnaces were shut down. A foreign correspondent writing from St. Petersburg said that by far the larger part of the foreign capital invested in Russia had been swept away in the panic. "This blow is all the harder for Russia," continued he, "as foreign capital for the future will be very

chary of investment in Russia." In connection with this panic the fact was brought out very clearly that on the whole Russia is by no means a country promising large returns on invested capital. Even the iron and steel works there, during the brief period of boom conditions, yielded only a net return of 5½ per cent.

How complete is the collapse of Russian industry may be gathered from a very few typical quotations. I will pick out twelve of the leading Russian industrial establishments owing their inception to Witte's industrial boom, and all of them among the soundest and most wisely managed of their kind. These are the four great steel works of Alexandrovsk, Bransk, Donetz-Yuryeff, Ssormovo, the machine works at Kolomna, Maltzeff, Putiloff, the Russian Locomotive Works, the Baltic Car Works, the Petersburg Metal Works, the Gleboff Works, and the Phœnix Car Works. On January 1, 1896, all of them had attained their maximum value at the bourse; in 1902 they had depreciated, some of them, by ninety-five per cent., others by ninety and eighty per cent., and not one of them by less than seventy per cent. The Gleboff works were utterly wiped out.

What was to be done in the face of such conditions? Witte could think of nothing better than to revert to his old method: Raising big loans in the foreign money market and engage in more railroad building with the millions thus obtained. Within two years he used up 310 million roubles in enlarging the existing facilities

of railroads or beginning the construction of new ones. The Moscow-Kasan Railroad and the Lodz Railroad were doubled in capacity. Three new railroads were projected and their construction begun, the Northern Line, the Orenburg-Tashkend, and the Bologoye-Sedlez, together about three thousand miles, as well as the new roads being built under the management of the Eastern China Company, with a projected length of 2377 verst. This, of course, brought new orders during 1902 and 1903 to industrial works. But this is virtually the sieve of the Danaids, without end or profit.

In all this it must be borne in mind that Russia is a very poor country, with very little capital, and that enterprises such as, for instance, England's projected Cape-to-Cairo Railroad, enterprises which for many years to come will be unprofitable from an economic point of view, are well enough for a nation with a large surplus of capital lying fallow and anxious for investment, but will never do for Russia. That country, as we have seen, has had for many years the annual problem confronting it of how to make its exports exceed its imports, so as to enable it to pay the interest and sinking fund in gold to foreign creditors without draining the nation of the necessary specie for the maintenance of her gold standard and the stability of her currency. That problem has become more acute with the enormous increase in Russia's foreign debt due to Witte's and Wishnegradsky's policy.

True, Witte's ingenious financial stratagems have not

been entirely in vain. Some part of Russia's new industry will take deeper root in the country; the results of the last ten years will not all vanish. The finance minister himself said in one of his public speeches that free competition, that is, free trade, is the ultimate object of protectionism. The economic ideal for Russia in his mind has been, in the main, the United States. The industrial rise of this country has all along powerfully impressed his imagination. And in very truth there are some striking parallels to be drawn between Russia and this country. But in a number of the vital points there are irreconcilable differences between the two countries, and it is very much to be feared that M. de Witte, shrewd and well-informed man as he is, has never obtained a sufficiency of reliable data about the internal conditions of the United States to see clearly in the matter.

For the time being, and for many years to come, the Russian internal market—as we have seen, the only one of any consequence that Russia can reckon with as a consumer of her industrial products—is not capable of assimilating the output of a large industry. Beyond question, a mass of industrial wares are now made in Russia which formerly were imported. With few exceptions they still require the protection of a very high tariff—on many articles, in fact, far beyond even our high tariff, and this notwithstanding the fact that labour is very low-priced there. At present a truthful verdict about the bulk of Russia's industrial products

would be: Dear and inferior. On the ruins of existing industrial establishments in Russia new ones will arise, acquired under financially more favourable circumstances and managed with more experience and sounder judgment. Thus, it is thinkable that in the course of twenty or thirty years Russia's industry will begin to pay. At present it most decidedly does not. And just as certainly the nation as a whole has become financially less potent by Witte's policy than it was before his advent. Untold millions have been sunk in the industrial vortex, and most of these losses can never be made good. The setback to Russian industry will tell for a period of ten years or more. National prosperity has seriously suffered. In itself, an industry erected purely on fiscalism, as Russia's is, rests on an insecure basis and cannot flourish for any great length of time.

During the past few years many warning voices have been raised in Russia itself demanding a complete abandonment of the system of Wishnegradsky and Witte. These voices have advocated a return to first causes. In other words, they have expressed the belief that the growth of Russian industry cannot be a healthy one unless it come by slow stages and through those organic channels in which moves the national temper. The foundation of this new industry in Russia must be the old cottage industry, the domestic peasant production. Blindly enough, the Russian government never perceived this fact, but of late indications are multiplying that this truth has percolated more or less through

all the strata of Russian society, high and low. M. de Witte's course as a financial reformer seems well-nigh run. Latest developments at the Russian court seem to verify this impression.

Although scarcely any help has been given the former industrial population in rural Russia, there are now signs of the growth of a huge movement in favour of the re-establishment everywhere of rural co-operative workshops, so-called *svietelka*, a peculiar Russian institution which had its source in serfdom. The Russian naturally works by co-operation. That is a peculiar feature of the national character. The *artel*, or association of workmen, is formed on the slightest pretext and in every walk of life. Even under present discouraging circumstances the *svietelka* has survived. Nay, more, it has improved in methods and enlarged its scope. Some of the large estate-holders are now assisting the peasantry in their environs, many of the older men and women having been their serfs in younger days, in establishing or enlarging such co-operative workshops. Agricultural reforms are in the end bound to come in Russia; it is only a question of time. Serious reverses in Russia's foreign policy—such as many expect will soon occur—may very likely precipitate them. By a system of financial aid and encouragement rendered either by the central government or, better still, by the *zemstva* (provincial administrative chambers) these *svietelka* could easily be made the nuclei of future industrial development.

These workshops at present are housed in rude, cheap buildings, hardly better than a peasant's *izba*, but larger and with more light. These buildings stand generally at a central point of the *volost* (name for one or several large village communes), and a number of peasants, in many cases with their wives and larger children, have clubbed together, after electing a *starosta* (foreman), for the purpose of manufacturing articles for which there is a ready sale in the vicinity. The trades followed by them in this way are very numerous, and embrace almost every description of spinning and weaving in wool, flax, hemp, cotton, and silk; metal work, from the manufacture of arms to knives and forks, locks and fish-hooks; *icons*, rude signboards, and innumerable other things that can be made in wood, bone, leather, pasteboard, and other materials. With their simple tools some of them are turning out even such elaborate articles as highly decorated and ornamented sledges and carriages (finding purchasers even at court), and indeed not a few of the articles turned out, especially in the matter of carving, are quite artistic.

At present this form of national industry finds no encouragement whatever on the part of the government. Witte's deluge of gold has not fructified it by the value of a single rouble. But there is inherent life in it, and while it, so far as scientific co-operation is concerned, is still in a stage of infancy, it could be brought to a much higher level with comparatively little trouble and slight expense. The national genius would evidently

find a better scope in it than it does in a Russian industry like the present one, modelled closely after that of much more advanced western nations. Even as it is, enterprising capitalists in Russia have discovered the industrial possibilities slumbering in this feature of national life. Some of these capitalists in Moscow, Vladimir, Tula, Pensa, Kaluga, Tver, and elsewhere have assisted with small sums such peasant *svietelka* in the manufacture of some of the articles mentioned before, and have attained handsome profits for themselves, while the peasant population has at least been prevented in such districts from starving during the long and idle winter. For earnings by the individual members of each *svietelka* are at present very low, averaging less than ten cents per diem.

The possibilities opening out for Russian industry in this particular sphere are unmeasured. Under men like Wishnegradsky and Witte these opportunities have been utterly neglected, as to avail themselves of them would be the work of many years; progress would be slow, but probably sure and safe, in nothing to be compared with the hothouse products of Russia's two recent financial geniuses. A wise legislator and administrator in Russia, whenever such a one may arise, will nevertheless take this matter up and devote to it his full attention.

## CHAPTER V

### AGRICULTURE AND PEASANTRY

Chief Reasons for the Decline of Both—Emancipation of the Serfs not an Unmixed Blessing—At Present Russian Peasant Holdings Average Five Acres per Head, Insufficient to Draw Enough for the Sustenance of Life — Conditions Worst in the "Black-Earth Belt"— Division and Subdivision of Holdings under the Workings of the Communal System—Excessive Rate of Land Taxation—A Russian National Fetish Based on Historical Error—Indications that the Communal System is Doomed—The *Kulak* as a Social and Economic Force in Rural Russia—Decrease of Fertility in Soil and in the Number of Cattle and Horses—Interesting Facts Gathered from Novikoff's Official Report —The Problem of Tax Arrears—Reasons why Famines have Become a Permanent Feature of Russia—Starving for the Benefit of Government Finances—The Average Russian Recruit on Joining the Army Eats his Fill for the First Time in his Life—A Realistic Picture of the Miseries of Russian Peasant Life — Peasant Wages Averaging Ten Cents per Diem—First Faint Traces of Rural Reform

SEVERAL main facts are responsible for the unhealthy condition of Russian agriculture. When Alexander II., in 1861, emancipated the Russian peasant from thraldom, he gave him for his future sustenance enough broad acres to till to satisfy the wants of so frugal a being. But that was forty-three years ago.

Since then the Russian peasantry have doubled in number, and the land which they hold has not increased in size. Division and subdivision have been going on these many years, and to-day the simple fact is that there is not enough land per head of the peasant population to yield adequate returns. This is one of the chief adverse facts in the matter. A noted Russian statistician, Lokhtin, claims that in the year 1892 only one hundred and eleven million dessyatines remained in the hands of the peasantry; of this seventy-four and one-third million dessyatines were tillable soil, the remainder meadows, forest, etc. This, he claims, meant only two dessyatines per head. These figures, of course, refer to Russia proper, not to the western borderlands of Poland, etc., or to Asiatic Russia. The "Crown peasant," that is, the one settled on estates belonging to the Crown, is better situated, and his land averages about four dessyatines per head. In Central Russia, that is, in the "black-earth belt," the subdivision of land has proceeded farthest, and it is precisely there that the circumstances of the peasant are most pitiable.

A Russian peasant family averages seven heads, and hence its holdings are about fourteen dessyatines (roughly speaking, thirty-five acres). But one of the great drawbacks to the ceaseless subdivision of peasant lands that has been going on is the splitting-up into small fragments, usually long and narrow and lying far apart, being not infrequently a number of miles distant

from the peasant's home, necessitating a tremendous loss of time and labour in the tilling. In fact, many of these fragments lie twelve or fifteen miles away from the village itself, and consist of lengthy strips, in many cases five or ten of them, each ten or twenty feet wide, thus forcing the starved horse to drag the plough for half a day in one direction to draw a furrow, and the other half to draw it back again. It will be easily seen that these facts alone hinder profitable agriculture enormously.

Each peasant owner must stick to the method of his neighbours. His cattle must graze at the time other cattle do; he must sow at the time his neighbours sow, or else his seed is trampled underfoot or destroyed. In short, whether he will or no, each peasant proprietor is ruled in his agricultural methods by the will and the needs of his fellows of the commune.

In many districts the drawbacks of this description amount to a veritable curse. In the district of Ouglitch, province of Yaroslav, that is, in the very centre of the empire, the average portion of each peasant is to-day cut into thirty-six separate strips. In twelve per cent. of the rural communities these narrow strips are of a width as low as three and one-half feet. Between 1875 and 1895 this process proceeded at a particularly rapid rate. Within those twenty years (according to the statements of M. Polenoff, Moscow, 1901) there was a loss of land per head of peasant population of twenty per cent. in the central provinces,

twenty-three per cent. in the eastern, and twenty-four per cent. in the southern districts. With that has gone a considerable diminution of grazing lands. In the fifty central provinces (out of the seventy-one of the whole of European Russia) there remain out of a total of 111 million dessyatines of peasant land only seventeen millions of meadows and fourteen millions of other pastures. Purchases of additional agricultural land by the peasant communes are hindered by existing legislation and other circumstances, and their total during the last twelve years has been inconsiderable. Because of joint communal ownership clover is nowhere to be seen on peasant lands. Agricultural implements are of the rudest, and the horses and cattle of the meanest.

Apparently reliable statistics claim that nowadays the Russian peasant retains from the crop for his own use only an average of twenty and one-half pood of cereals. These are the figures of Lokhtin, while another Russian authority, Simkhovitch, puts the figures even lower, at nineteen pood, and gives detailed statements for each province and for many separate districts.

However, these statistics are evidently not to be relied upon. In dealing with Russia's peasantry trustworthy figures are very difficult to obtain for several reasons, one being that the peasant himself views with suspicion all attempts made to get at the truth regarding his standard of life. In his dull mind he connects all such attempts with the tax collector, his arch-enemy, and from the latter he naturally hides all facts and fig-

ures which might enable that official to "squeeze" some additional roubles out of him. The above figures cannot very well be true, because if they were many more millions of Russian peasants would have starved to death before now than have actually done so.

But what an awful curse to the country this steadily proceeding diminution per head of peasant land has been and is, may be clearly seen in some of the formerly most flourishing agricultural districts, as, for instance, in those of Little Russia. In years gone by the peasant farmer in that part of the country considered a holding of from forty-five to fifty dessyatines as necessary to yield him living profits. Relatively few of these peasant farms in Little Russia comprised less than sixty-five dessyatines; from that they have dwindled to an average of eight. There, as throughout the entire corn belt of European Russia, formerly amongst the most fertile in the world, the soil has been subjected for many years, in certain districts for centuries, to such wasteful methods that it has become barren or exhausted. Within the last forty years alone the productivity of the soil within the "black-earth belt" has been reduced by fully one-third.

Another great evil, intimately connected with the above, is the rural communal system under which Russia's peasantry are still living. This peculiarly Russian institution has been raised by ill-advised Russian writers to the rank of a national fetish. As a matter of fact, this system has been the direct or indirect cause

of the death and misery of many millions. As to the false claim that it is very ancient, a survival and direct descendant of pristine Aryan rural institutions, Russian history itself disproves it completely. The truth is that individual peasant proprietorship in the soil has during the past three hundred years been gradually abolished by the Russian government. Before that the Russian peasant was the free owner both of his person and his lands. For purely technical and administrative purposes the central government changed this step by step and district by district; it enjoined communal responsibility for the taxes, in order to insure the easy and safe inflowing of the administrative revenues. Serfdom itself was an outgrowth of this innovation. But so slow was the thorough carrying-out of this great change that in some districts in the north of European Russia the system of communal ownership had not been introduced up to 1830 and later, and the peasants there had to be treated as rioters and traitors to the state for forcibly resisting the measure. The joint proprietorship of the rural acres has been protected by the government until the present. By a law of December 14, 1893, it is provided that the easier methods of acquiring individual land by the peasant, such as the law of 1861 decreed, were to be abrogated and such purchases, even in exceptional cases, to be made dependent on the consent of the commune and on the specific sanction of the ministers of the interior and finance. The evident motive for this was that only the diligent and relatively

prosperous peasant member of a commune could ever think of separating from the latter and acquiring individual property in land. By such separation, therefore, each commune would lose its most progressive and industrious members, and the burden of taxation would then rest with additional weight on the remaining members, thus disturbing the tax and revenue system of the government very seriously.

Under present conditions the ambitious peasant cannot aspire to individual ownership in land; he cannot exert his greater initiative, enterprise, superior mental gifts, and diligence to his own advantage, and the prevailing system robs the government and the country as a whole of all the fruits which would naturally accrue to the more pushing and successful portion of the peasantry. The better man must continue to suffer for the faults and shortcomings of his less able neighbour; he must make up for the taxes which his unprogressive or unfortunate fellow-member of the commune has failed to earn. Rational progress in rural communities is simply impossible under such circumstances. Much has been made by unwise Russian jingoes of the Russian *mir*. It has been represented by them as something in which Russia is far in advance of Europe, something which western countries would do well to take pattern by, and which the benighted world of non-Russians is looking upon with envy. The exact opposite is the truth. As we have seen, the Russian rural communal system is a species of particularly harmful atavism; a

step not in advance, but leading back to the darkest Middle Ages. That this is true many cool-headed and unbiassed Russians themselves admit. The movement in Russia for the abolishment of this system has gained tremendous strength during the past score of years. On its final success, it is perfectly safe to say, hinges in good part the question of the rise of Russia to more modern and prosperous conditions.

Even the central government in St. Petersburg has at times shown evidence of being won over to this view. The abolition of the existing system of joint ownership in the soil and of joint responsibility for the communal taxes has been advocated by more than one responsible Russian statesman. M. de Witte himself, in a pamphlet printed in German a number of years ago, and published in Stuttgart, avowed himself an adherent to this reform. That was, of course, before he had pledged himself unalterably to his present financial system. Goremykin, one-time member of the Russian cabinet, likewise espoused this cause in his writings, and many other men in high government positions have done the same.

Everywhere in Russia the signs multiply pointing to the approaching end of this suicidal communal system. Certainly, things have come to such a pass in Russian agriculture that they cannot go on much longer at the present rate without involving the whole nation in the growing misery of its most important and numerous section of the total population, the peasantry.

Communal ownership, including that of the tillable soil subdivided in such a manner as to grant to each member of the community a strip of land, larger or smaller, for cultivation, until such time as the *mir* (village council) should decide on a redivision, was brought about by very practical reasons, but also reasons which in the long run told against the good of the commune itself and of the country. The Russian jingo has attempted to represent the system as surrounded by an aureole of democratic social equality. All peasants, all members of the community, are to be on an equal footing, that is his claim. But as everywhere, so here, too, human nature has not endured this ideal of equality for a long space. On the contrary, inequality was at once established. It did not require much time after the emancipation of the serfs, until there were to be found in each village some ex-serfs poor and some less poor, some in miserable straits and some on the highroad to prosperity. On the one side the process of pauperisation proceeded apace, and this with the continued subdivision of land brought many of the members of each community lower and lower; so that an increasing number of peasants lost first their horse, then their cow, next their agricultural implements, and then were driven either to adopt another calling beside that of cultivating the soil in order to make a living or else to abandon their little strip of land and find employment as labourers in village or town. This process, steadily proceeding for the last forty years and

over, culminated in a "differentiation" among the peasantry.

On the other side arose the *kulak* (literally, the "fist"), a name coined to designate those ex-serfs and simple peasants who, utilising the unpropitious economical conditions of their fellow-members of the commune, made one after the other their debtors, next their hired labourers, and appropriated for their own individual use the land shares of these economical weaklings.

The *kulak* is a very interesting figure in rural Russia. Whole libraries have been written in Russia denouncing him. And, there is no doubt that the methods used by this usurer and oppressor in the peasant's blouse have not been of the cleanest. His advent happened, as pointed out above, soon after the emancipation itself. But the conspicuous position he now occupies came about during the last twenty and thirty years. In Russian literature he has been dubbed the "village-eater," and has been clothed with all sorts of diabolical qualities. He has been described as the bitter foe of the national heirloom, the rural commune, and has been fought with fair means and foul. But the *kulak* would not down. And this for a very simple reason: He is the natural product of a vicious system; in a manner he represents the natural law of evolution and progress, though in his person and methods he distorts this natural law, being hampered by all sorts of obstacles.

Nevertheless, the more subdivision of the communal acres went on, and the more the peasant was compelled to look for a living beyond the tilling of his little strip of land, the smaller the results of this tilling became, and the more frequently famine overtook communes, whole districts, and provinces, the easier it became for the *kulak* to have and to maintain the upper hand within his small sphere of activity. The more difficult, too, it became for the *mir* to concentrate against the *kulak* the two-thirds of the totality of votes required by law to oust him from those lands acquired by him usuriously or by other devious ways.

During the eighties the process here outlined had already progressed to the extent that in twenty-two Central Russian provinces (where the government instituted an investigation) thirteen per cent. of all peasant holdings were entirely without cattle, and it was found that 1,100,000 peasant households had no horses. In these same provinces during the last ten years, as official statistics show, the number of horses has diminished by another 1,393,400, that is, by twenty-one and one-half per cent. in the Eastern and by twenty-nine per cent. in the Central "black-earth belt"; the number of peasant households without horses had increased by 185,100. This means more than appears on the face. It means the results of the *kulak's* labours. The peasants who with their families were registered by the government as the nominal owners of pauperised holdings, have simply, for a

consideration, left the exploitation of their lands to the financially more potent and enterprising *kulak*, and have become either his hired labourers or else have gone to town to earn a living; in many cases, too, the practically expropriated peasants are combining the two functions of hired rural labourers during the summer and industrial laborers in town during the winter.

Statistics taken, and special researches made by the government everywhere in European Russia, have disclosed similar facts, differing only in degree. Thus, for instance, an investigation in 1891 made in five "black-earth" provinces, namely, Chernigoff, Voronesh, Poltava, Saratoff, and Kursk, showed that of the 915,140 peasant households in question twenty-five per cent. were without cattle and horses, another twenty-six per cent. had only one head of cattle or horse, and forty-nine per cent had two or more heads. In sixteen provinces of the East and South the number of peasant farms without animal help of any kind rose by 3.6 per cent. between 1882 and 1891; during the last ten years, with their frequent famines, these figures have risen enormously.

The *kulak*, as was said, though individually perhaps not a lovable specimen of humanity, nevertheless stands in rural Russia for the principle of progress. Individual ownership in the soil once established, Russian agricultural conditions, freed from their present fetters, would enter on a normal progressive course. Many additional thousands of economically weak farms

would pass definitely into other hands, but the peasantry as a whole would profit by that. Farms and individual holdings of land would gain in size, and the present system, obtaining with the vast majority of Russian peasants, of leading a hand-to-mouth life, would cease. Communal joint ownership promotes only the evil qualities in man: sloth, carelessness, mismanagement; it suppresses the economical virtues: diligence, economy, individual enterprise. This great curse removed, natural conditions of agrarian development, kept back for three hundred years by artificial and mechanical impediments, would be restored.

The rise of a sort of peasant aristocracy (at present represented by the *kulak*) we have traced in the above. But this is as yet neither numerous nor encouraged by laws; on the contrary, conditions at this hour hinder its spread. For it is not only the question of joint ownership in land which makes against such an aristocracy; in equal measure joint tax responsibility and the enormously high rate of land taxation tell against it. Taxes, indeed, weigh with crushing force upon the economically ruined Russian peasantry of the lower grade.

As to the question of joint tax responsibility, there is no possible doubt, and the facts are well ascertained. If joint communal ownership works great harm, joint tax responsibility works perhaps even greater. Hand in hand with abolishment of the present communal system, will go the abolishment of the other.

The present burden of land taxation, on the other hand, is a matter which it is not so easy to determine in its full details. The facts taken in their entirety warrant us in saying that with the prevailing rural system still in force, that is, with a financially impotent peasantry, the present Russian land tax is unequivocally too high. But as to details, sources and authorities differ so greatly that it is almost impossible to make positive statements. A number of Russian economic writers of the first rank, such, for instance, as Nikolai-On, Simkhovitch, Schwanebach, Brcheski, Lokhtin, and others, in recent writings quote facts and figures apparently obtained from reliable data—in every case based on government material—which show a picture of Russian rural misery so sombre and full of despair that the human mind is loth to accept it as true. There are other writers in Russia whose accounts are in a somewhat more hopeful vein, but even their statistics present horrible outlines. One fact to be again taken into consideration in this connection is the unreliability of even Russian official statistics, a fact previously alluded to, and the great cunning of the Russian peasant in withholding or concealing property of every kind from the tax gatherer, and the falsifying of returns made by him as to his crops and the productivity of his land. Taking, therefore, all these things into account, and making due allowance for the unreliability of the data at hand, enough remains without dispute to demonstrate that the one hundred millions of Russia's peasant

population are in a condition so low and apparently so hopeless that modern history scarcely affords a parallel.

The few figures appearing hereafter in illustration of this have been obtained by a strict process of elimination, and are without exception official. But for a general presentation of the leading causes of rural misery the remarkable report of M. Novikoff, a *zemski natchalnik* (an influential official controlling peasant affairs in each province), is in the main relied upon. This report has virtues which the others referred to do not possess, namely, an intimate acquaintance with peasant affairs obtained at first hand, and likewise a spirit of transparent impartiality.

Novikoff tells us that in the whole "black-earth belt" the land tax per head of male rural population amounts to about eight to nine roubles yearly, which means an average of four to four and one-half roubles per dessyatine of cultivated land, or a trifle more than half the annual rental of such land. In the tax burden is comprised everything which the peasant has to pay in legal dues, that is, not only the government land tax, but also the redemption tax (that is, the annual instalments still owing from the ex-serfs and their children and grandchildren to the government for the land given them, forty-three years ago, at the time of emancipation), provincial and communal taxes. This same authority claims that in the industrial districts of the empire and in the lake districts to the North, the amount of taxes often exceeds the net returns of the soil

itself. In many cases, he says, the peasant would willingly abandon his land on a quit-claim deed, absolving him from all further financial responsibilities. But the communal system will not permit that. The lack of rational agricultural methods, due partly to ignorance on the peasant's part, but in larger measure to the subdivision of holdings spoken of before, is another element of prime importance in the pauperisation process. Soil has been cultivated for centuries without once receiving new nourishment in the shape of manure, and exhaustion of its chemically valuable properties has set in in varying degree.

In a country showing a scarcity of large and industrious towns—towns, too, separated from each other by distances often measured by hundreds of miles, and inaccessible from the interior rural districts except by a weary trudge on foot along sandy or morass-like roads —auxiliary earnings for the peasant are difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, the peasant, alone or with his elder sons, seldom accompanied by wife or small children, undertakes annual tramps to towns, leaving his unproductive land to be tended by his family and earning during the summer a matter of twenty or thirty roubles, often but ten or twelve, as chance has favoured him, and then returns home in the fall to satisfy the tax collector. We may well believe Novikoff when he says that the period when the taxes become due is one of greatest anxiety to the Russian peasant. In his report this official speaks at length of the many forms

of corruption, crude or mild, to which the poor peasant is exposed. In doing so he unconsciously deals heavy blows to the purely centralised and bureaucratic form of Russian government.

Incidentally, the report calls attention to one execrable feature of this bureaucratism, namely, its uniform pressure upon the whole empire, irrespective of the great differences in local conditions. Thus, the tax is levied and gathered in the early fall, during September as a rule, and the peasant is forced to sell part of his crop for what it will fetch to satisfy the demands of the government. In many cases, prices being low, due to vast amounts of agricultural products being thrown simultaneously on the market, and also because of the unscrupulousness of the local dealers, the peasant has to sell his entire crop and add to it part of the slender earnings he has saved during the preceding months, in order to make up the full amount owing the central and local governments for land tax and for arrears left over from the previous year or years. But not this alone, those districts which have not yet reaped their harvest are also compelled to pay taxes at this time. The Russian tobacco, for instance, is harvested at a later time in the year, and cultivators are obliged to borrow at heavy discount. Fishing villages (and there are thousands of them in Russia, depending for their prosperity on the catch of certain fish at a particular season or month) are afflicted with similar disadvantages. In November many of these districts would

have the money for their taxes, but meanwhile they are fined again and again by the *ispravnik* (police commissioner), acting on the reports of tax delinquencies made by the *ouriadnik* (rural police official), and when their money begins to come in there are new charges to be met. Russian bureaucracy takes account of none of these things: from the White to the Black Sea the taxes throughout the vast empire have to be paid on a certain day, no matter if this should mean ruin to thousands of rural communities.

And yet despite all this pressure coming from police and tax collector, despite heavy fines and official browbeating, arrears are unavoidable. The peasant often finds it simply impossible to raise the amount of his taxes. The public sale of his last bits of personal property is threatened, and the peasant borrows money on almost any conditions, or else sells the most necessary things for what they will bring. Novikoff says that the peasant would look upon a usurer lending him money at this time at thirty per cent. as a benefactor. Nevertheless arrears of taxes increase year by year, and this particularly in the great "black-earth belt" of Central Russia. These peasant arrears of taxes amounted in 1893 in forty-six out of the seventy-one provinces of European Russia to 119½ million roubles, 110 of which fell to the share of the Centre. These arrears were, of course, very unevenly apportioned, and in the provinces of Oufa, Kasan, Orenburg, and Samara they exceeded the annual taxes themselves by two hun-

dred or three hundred per cent. In 1896 these arrears were 142½ millions, despite the fact that a year before eight millions had been remitted.

It is owing to the unfortunate economical conditions of the Russian peasant that he has also been unable to pay up his redemption tax. This item on January 2, 1901, had risen to two hundred and fifty million roubles, arrearages independent of the above named. During the year 1901—a year of extensive famines, as will be remembered—both land and redemption tax arrearages increased largely.

To all these drawbacks must be added the deleterious effects upon Russia's peasantry of the new financial system, first inaugurated in a mild way by Bunge, during the administration of Alexander III., and then brought to its present heights by Wishnegradsky and Witte. We have seen that the latter all along has bent his energies to the task of maintaining, first, the gold standard established by him, and next (as a necessary corollary) the excess of exports over imports. To keep these exports at a certain height Witte found it not only expedient, but absolutely necessary to spur on the Russian agricultural producer in the sale and export of his commodities. That brought about the regular appearance of the tax gatherer early in the fall, just after the crop had been harvested, and the consequences of that measure we have traced above. Let us now see a little more in detail how the system operates.

In autumns when cereals are low-priced, the Russian

peasant has to sell larger quantities of his produce to make up his taxes. He thus denudes himself of all reserves in foodstuffs, and later in the winter he has to repurchase enough of the latter at increased prices to keep him from starving; his seed corn he must, of course, pay for at still higher rates in the early spring. On the other hand, those years when cereals command high prices are almost always years of deficient crops in Russia and, consequently, years of famine. Thus, prices ruled high during the Russian famine years of 1891 and 1892, but the starving peasant had nothing to sell. In 1894, a year of great plenty in Russia, local prices fell enormously. In the province of Samara that year the pood of wheat sold at sixty kopeks up to one and one-half roubles, and rye sold there at even less than half these prices. In the year following, 1895, cereals were even lower in Russia. Along the Volga the pood sold at eleven to nineteen kopeks, and in the province of Poltava barley (the main cereal there) at nine kopeks the pood. Of course, the lower the prices of cereals, the more of them had to be exported in order to maintain the favourable balance of trade and to increase the gold reserve of the state.

This export movement in cereals can be quite clearly shown. In 1864, Russia exported in breadstuffs 121½ million pood, of the value of 54⅔ millions, which meant about thirty-three per cent. of her entire export. Between 1882 and 1887 was exported an average of 312 million pood yearly of cereals. Then came Wishne-

gradsky with his artificially strengthened export, yielding an annual average until 1891 of 442 million pood. Under Witte's administration this cereal export rose till 1897 to an annual average of 523 million pood. This meant during certain years one-fourth of the entire cereal production of the Russian Empire. Of this the peasant furnished 350 million pood, the remainder of one third coming from the estates of the nobles and from Crown domains. Since then export cereal figures have gone on rising. During 1894 the figure was 639½ million pood and 575 in 1895. How perfectly incapable Russia, devoid of capital, is to retain for future use a considerable part of her cereal treasure, is proven by the fact that the export does not decrease, and in some cases actually increases, during famine times. During the worst famine year, that of 1891, the export decreased by only twenty-seven million pood. In 1897 Russia had a deficient crop, but during the last six months of that year 233½ million pood were exported, that is, more than during the same period of preceding good years; and during the first six months of 1898 were exported another 241½ million pood, more than the average. In 1901 the government, early in the summer, was thoroughly apprised of the fact that the crop would fail in a large part of Russia. The budget report for 1901 showed a total cereal production of the empire amounting to 3050 million pood, a deficiency of 236 millions when compared with the average of the preceding five years. This deficiency was just about one-half of the

average cereal export. Nevertheless, the cereal export rose in 1901. The simple explanation of this apparent phenomenon lies in the fact that the Russian population was financially impotent to retain at home enough breadstuffs to feed her hungry masses.

In this connection it may be well to cite Lokhtin's figures as to the annual per capita production of cereals (including potatoes) of the fifty provinces making up the heart of the empire. These figures are 22.4 pood of total production, and 18.8 pood after the deduction of exports, which means a lower figure of breadstuffs per head of population than in any civilised country of modern times. It needs no words to point out that with such a low average of consumption the peasant can retain no considerable surplus.

To put the matter in a nutshell: By far the greater part of the Russian people are constantly underfed or starving for the benefit of government finances; and this purely because the peasant is too poor to keep for his own use (after paying his taxes) enough bread.

The above figures seem almost incredible, for we find nothing like them in the official statistics of other countries; but these figures seem, nevertheless, to be borne out by the cold facts. They constitute a surprising testimony to the want of harmony in Russia between national finances and national economy. Nowhere else do we see the astounding circumstance that the private soldier is fed much more liberally and on far more nutritious food than falls to the share of the vast bulk of

the population. We cannot wonder at the fact that the young Russian peasant in joining the rank and file of the enormous national army for a term of years, looks upon his lot not only with complacency, but with actual joy. For the first time in his life he can eat his fill. As a peasant the Russian recruit saw meat only thrice a year; cabbage, sour rye bread, and grits formed his diet, washed down, now and then in summer, with inexpensive and innutritious *qvas* (a slightly fermented cereal decoction). As a soldier he receives per year twenty-nine pood of grits and flour (eleven pood more than the national average) and meat—bacon—in proportion.

Meat production in Russia has decreased, while all over Europe and in the United States it has vastly increased. During 1888 to 1898 the number of cattle has actually diminished in Russia by almost one per cent., despite the increase in population and despite the vast steppes and grazing grounds of her nomad hordes in the South and South-east. Russia to-day consumes in beef fully one-third less per head of population than does Germany, one-half less than England, and over sixty per cent. less than the United States. The case stands similar in the matter of the raising of sheep, swine, and horses; that also decreases steadily every year, and per head of population the decrease is still more considerable.

The latest official researches, quoted by Polenoff, have shown that within the last ten years horses have decreased within the nine provinces of the Centre proper

by 117,000, in the East (four provinces) by 68,000, and a similar proportion of decrease has been observed in all the other Russian provinces. But as a remarkable fact—remarkable because it shows the extreme poverty of the country—it deserves mention that in spite of this uniform decrease the export of cattle, horses, swine—live stock as well as in the form of meat, hides, tallow, etc.—is steadily rising. And instead of seeing in this deplorable fact a sign calling for ameliorating measures, the Russian government—more particularly its finance minister—rejoices at this growing export and strives to promote it in every possible way.

Thus, in October, 1901, M. de Witte in conjunction with the department of agriculture took elaborate steps to further the export of Russian butter and meat to England. A commission of thirty agricultural experts was sent to London, at an expense to the government of fifty thousand roubles, to organise this export. Of course, it was money utterly wasted. Russian meat particularly, coming as it does from underfed cattle, is entirely too tough and sapless to suit the British palate, notoriously the hardest to please in the matter of meat.

As the Russian peasant is not able to live off the proceeds of his bit of land, he is obliged to earn money elsewhere and to leave the care of his few acres to his wife and children. It is, however, very difficult for him to find remunerative employment away from his home. In Central Russia the whole industry is concentrated in Moscow and in a few towns situated in the adjoining

three or four provinces. Outside of the industrial Centre such establishments are few and far between, lying often hundreds, nay, thousands of verst apart. For the metal works of Tula and Bransk are not considerable, and the collieries and smelting works of the Donetz lie far to the North. In any event, the whole of Russian industry employs at present (that is, during prosperous times) only between two and three millions of both sexes. What does that amount to when compared with a needy peasant population of over one hundred millions?

The "black-earth belt" is entirely dependent on agriculture, and the mass of the peasantry there, so far as they cannot utilise their time in the before-mentioned domestic industry and in the *svietelka*, have to go idle during one-half the year. It is estimated (both by Mulhall and Golovine) that the average earnings of the Russian peasant do not exceed eighteen to nineteen kopeks per diem, or about nine to ten cents. In another chapter we have seen the reasons for the downfall of the rural domestic industry, the cottage system. During the past score of years Russian agriculture has more and more been given over to the production of cereals. The peasant no longer grows flax or hemp, nor does he raise sheep to utilise their fleece, excepting in a minimal way, barely sufficient to meet the wants of his family.

The contrast is indeed a striking one between the Russian rural commune, shackling its members eco-

nomically, and the centralising state, which exacts large taxes in money. This contrast explains the lack of material development as well as the want of a growth in individual energy. This fact is illustrated in colonies, single villages, and certain districts, scattered through various outlying provinces of Russia in Europe and Asia. There the communal system of joint ownership and responsibility has been done away with, and the consequence has been relative or positive prosperity. Even such a zealous advocate of Old Russian prejudices and real or imaginary peculiarly Russian institutions as is Prince Mestcherski could not fail to note this difference. Writing about certain free Russian colonies and settlements along the Lower Volga, he grew quite enthusiastic in the *Grashdanin* of St. Petersburg. Again, another illustration. Russia possesses vast German colonies. Some of these are located in the South-west, others in the Caucasus, others on the Volga. In the latter they have adopted the Russian communal system; result, misery, slovenliness, loss of industry. Those in the South and South-west have stuck to the rural system of their Suabian forefathers, retaining individual ownership in land; result, prosperity, progress, order, and cleanliness. The German Mennonite colonies in Russia have likewise been flourishing for over a century, ever since the days of Catherine II., who encouraged them to come. It was purely owing to a breach of faith on the part of the Russian government, namely, the refusal longer to

abide by the pledge made by the great Russian empress not to exact military service from them, that many left their old homesteads to emigrate to the United States and Canada. But, of course, the Mennonites, too, were believers in individual possession of their acres.

As hinted before, even the Russian government, wilfully blind as it has been for so long, now begins to see the folly of its ways, and is seriously considering the abolishment of the Russian communal system. Hints of such an intention were first contained in M. de Witte's budget report for 1899. In it he spoke favourably of doing away with the joint tax responsibility of the rural communes. A beginning in this direction has since been made. The law of 1899 limits joint tax responsibility and promises its ultimate abolishment. Other reform measures, such as the re-awarding of peasant holdings through the *mir* at intervals of not less than twelve years, etc., look promising. Such matters as communal readjustments in land and the payment of proper remuneration by the commune for improvements effected, are also touched upon in this law. Altogether, it can be said that this is the first serious reform measure—though at present only on a modest scale and made in a halting way—that has been brought about in the rural conditions of Russia during the past forty years. The law marks at least a tendency in the right direction, and it is probably acting the part of wisdom to proceed slowly, step by step,

when the object to be benefited is a being so ultra-conservative as is the Russian peasant.

An agricultural commission has been at work under the auspices of the imperial government and headed, successively, by such able men as Kovalevski and Kokovzeff, busy with preparing the way for further steps in this direction, concentrating their attention mainly on that part of the empire in direst need, that is, the Centre, the "black-earth belt." At the conclusion of their preliminary labours, in 1902, a new expert commission was appointed. This is composed of ministers and high dignitaries, under the chairmanship of the finance minister, and with the right to summon experts for advice. Unfortunately, the choosing of this commission was dictated by a purely bureaucratic spirit, and not much is to be expected of it. On the contrary, it is greatly to be feared that the rural reform spoken of has been greatly endangered by this very commission. Not one of its members possesses the necessary qualifications to grapple successfully with a subject requiring a very intimate knowledge of rural conditions in Russia, differing as they do so greatly in different parts of the empire. Nevertheless, the fact that Witte himself has remained at its head, even now that he has been transferred, nominally at least, to a different sphere of the Russian public service, seems to afford a guaranty that something worth while will ultimately result from all these labours.

It would be a mistake to assume that the Russian

peasant is inherently incapable of enterprise. Cases come under the observation of every open-minded traveller or resident in Russia disproving such an assumption. Of his being a "handy man" proof was furnished elsewhere. He has in a pronounced degree mechanical talent. But under favouring circumstances, though, it must be admitted, only in individual cases, he likewise shows initiative and mercantile gift. It must be remembered, for one thing, that the Russian merchants, as a class, are the descendants, one or more generations removed, of Russian peasant serfs. One striking illustration of such individual peasant enterprise as mentioned above came under the author's observation years ago. At a banquet given by the Russian minister in Teheran, Persia, beer was served which everybody present admitted to be of superior quality. It resembled closely, in fact, both in palatableness and appearance, the best Munich brand. Inquiry revealed the fact that it had been sent in barrels from Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga, down the length of the Caspian Sea to Resht, the main Persian harbour. This beer was sold throughout Central Asia. The makers of this beer were the sons of poor Russian peasant serfs, who years before had left the paternal *izba* and drifted down to Astrakhan. There, after a while, they had founded a bit of a brewery on their joint slender savings, had later on obtained on contract a high-salaried foreman of a Munich brewery, and by diligence and enterprise had made their establishment a complete success.

Looking through the statistical data collected and issued by the *zemstva* and other rural authorities, one thing becomes apparent. The standard of life of the Russian peasant is extremely low. In many interior provinces (for it must be remembered that conditions as portrayed here apply in the main only to the fifty provinces composing the heart of Russia, and not so much to the twenty-one border provinces towards the South, the whole West, and part of the North) a large percentage of the village population, say one-fourth to one-third, live in hovels in comparison with which even the crazy cabins of the poor cotter and crofter in the West of Ireland or the Scotch Highlands seem palace-like. In length and breadth these hovels of the Russian peasant measure an average of six *arsheens* (four and one-half yards), and in height they are only half that. In the one room making up this dwelling the entire family —averaging between seven and eight—have their being, and it usually houses as well the rough-coated horse (if there is one), the cow, the pigs, sheep, and fowls; though in the majority of cases these domestic animals are conspicuous by their absence. Of sanitary arrangements, both within and without the house, there is, of course, no trace, and it is no wonder that epidemics of cholera, typhus, diphtheria, scarlet-fever, smallpox, and other contagious diseases hold high carnival under such circumstances. But of these things the world has learned quite a deal of late years. It is more to the purpose of this book to speak of the fact

that the official statistics of the ministry of agriculture in Russia show for the rural labourer an average per diem wage during the summer of twenty-seven to thirty-six kopeks (seven to nine pence, or fourteen to eighteen cents), that is, in the "black-earth belt," while in the South-west as much as forty to sixty kopeks is paid (ten to fifteen pence, or twenty to thirty cents). That means, of course, the long Russian summer day of fifteen to seventeen hours. In those districts of Russia where cottage industry has survived—creating a sort of competition in the labour market—wages run even higher, but nowhere do average annual earnings for the rural labourer exceed fifty roubles yearly. That is about the maximum, and from that there is a sliding scale sinking as low as seventeen roubles per annum, this last figure applying to the earth-workers and potters of Perm. At best these earnings last five or six months in every year and then comes for the great bulk of the rural population the long idleness of winter. The daily average of earnings seems to be, indeed, spread over the whole year, rather below than above Mulhall's eighteen to nineteen kopeks, at least for the men working in the "black-earth belt." The figures do not include the additional earnings of the Russian peasant by industrial labour in town nor those of his wife and children and other members of the family by following various pursuits, such as domestic industry, the raising of vegetables, or the work in urban factories. The total earnings of a Russian peasant

family must be somewhat higher than the figures given by Mulhall and other authorities, for a careful computation of the average prices of foodstuffs even in low-priced Russia reveals the fact that it is impossible there to support a family on the most modest scale at a figure less than about forty-five to fifty roubles per year.

Indeed, the latest and most reliable statistics of Russia show that the average annual expenditures of a peasant family amount to sixty-three roubles twenty kopeks, of which twenty roubles forty-four kopeks are for food. Still, accepting these figures, they show a standard of life very far below that in any other country of Europe, not even excluding Turkey.

As the world knows, the vice of drunkenness is the besetting sin of the Russian peasant. It is indeed surprising how large a part of his total meagre earnings disappears in vodka. There is plenty of excuse for him, of course. It would require a moral force far beyond what can be expected in the circumstances for this poor fellow to resist the temptation of the bottle, and of the exhilaration and oblivion which it brings. But in any case, this vice is an additional curse to him, viewed merely from an economic point. No saint's day, no communal celebration of any kind, no social diversion, without the delights of the bottle. The poorest of Russian villages will frequently find means to indulge jointly in a veritable orgy, when a number of gallons of this vile stuff, the Russian potato brandy, will be consumed. It is the only joy in this world the

peasant knows of. Economy he has never been taught; in fact, it would be rather a hindrance than a help to him under conditions of communal joint ownership.

Scanning the figures of the official budget report for 1902, it is remarked that the average consumption of alcohol per head of population had been for the preceding ten years a matter of only three-quarters of a gallon; but this means spirits measured solely according to the percentage of alcohol they contain. In other words, the real consumption (relying on these figures) of vodka, beer, wine, and other liquors sold by government monopoly is probably about three or four gallons per head. This, it must be admitted, remains below one's expectations. But for one thing it must not be forgotten that the peasant manufactures himself weak but yet spirituous liquors, such as *qvas* (of which great quantities are consumed), and which escape the government tax. On the other hand, the government monopoly of the sale of spirits has raised the price of the latter very greatly. To get an idea of this it is but necessary to remark that the cost per head to the peasant for the liquor which he consumes means an annual outlay of three roubles sixty-five kopeks and that the government takes of this sum in the form of taxes two roubles twenty-five kopeks. Therefore, while the peasant spends over one-tenth of the total earnings of himself and family on liquor, the government makes him pay for it about 130 per cent. more than it costs. In a peasant family composed of several adult male

members the outlay on liquor is, of course, much larger, amounting to one-fifth or one-fourth even of the total earnings of that family.

Novikoff's report, to which repeated reference has been made, describes graphically the utter desolation and misery of the average peasant family. The heating of the *izba* is done in the most primitive fashion, and in such a way that it alone accounts for much of the enormous mortality, a mortality which is only equalled by the rapid increase of births. Reading his pages, it seems indeed a miracle how one hundred millions of human beings, living under a form of Christianity and a government which prides itself on the term of "paternal," can have patiently borne for so many years such frightful conditions, without a murmur, never losing their trust either in the Church (which does absolutely nothing to alleviate their sufferings) or in the Czar. The Russian peasant proverb, "Russia is great, and the Czar is far away," sounds like a dull cry of despair. However, even the Russian peasant, seasoned as he is and inured to hardship and starvation, cannot escape the physical and moral consequences of such pitiless and incessant conditions. In the "black-earth belt," mortality has increased at a frightful rate, and the population figure remains stationary. Outside that belt things are far better, it is true. There is a great scarcity of physicians, of hospitals, and midwives. In the Centre there is one regular physician to every 26,740 persons, and in the outlying provinces one to

every 48,800, the average for the whole empire being one to every 35,000. Of course, the peasant does not rely on either druggist or doctor; he goes to the "Knowing One," that is, the "wise woman," and she works her spells on him and his family. Ignorance is so dense that even the most elementary laws of health are constantly violated. The peasant women are nearly all sufferers from a complication of ills and diseases. During the nursing period peasant babies are generally brought up on the bottle, together with a mush made of rye bread.

The annual increase in population is, so far as the empire as a whole is concerned, 1.38 per cent., but for the distinctively Russian district, that is, Centre, South, South-west, and East, it is only less than one-fifth of this, namely, 0.26 per cent. In some of the border provinces of Russia, particularly Poland and the Baltic provinces, the increase in population is 2.2 per cent., which is more than eight times the increase in the Centre.

It is not astonishing that the Russian peasantry in the "black-earth belt" of late are emigrating both to Siberia and to the border provinces. By tens of thousands they annually leave their villages to settle on virgin land in Western Siberia. And yet the provinces they leave were endowed by nature with extremely fertile soil, and the density of population even in these central provinces is to-day less than half that of Germany, and below one-sixth that of Belgium. But the

peasant in the Centre is steadily degenerating. The annual recruiting for the army shows that plainly. The number of men found unfit for military service is large and constantly increasing. Both in deficient width of chest and in lesser height he forms a striking contrast with the Russian living under more propitious conditions.

Devastations by fire are another curse of the Russian peasant. The villages are very populous. Some of them have as many as fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants, and the average is somewhere between two and three thousand. Buildings stand close together, and very few of them are made of anything more durable than wood and a straw thatch. It is not surprising, therefore, that the annual ravages by fire must be reckoned by hundreds of millions, and this despite the cheapness of the material. Insurance there is none. Of the large number of holidays mention was made before. These enforced days of idleness have encouraged the natural slothfulness and indolence of the peasant population. On holidays the peasant even during critical harvest times will prefer to see his crop destroyed by a sudden shower, a severe thunder-storm, or hail, rather than violate the behests of the Church and State by turning to and saving what he has toiled for so patiently.

The Russian of every degree is subject to sudden and prolonged "sprees"; the Russian word for that is *sapoi*. A man, usually diligent and sober, will without warn-

ing devote himself for the space of days or weeks exclusively to hard drinking, then returning to his usual work. This is an irresistible physical craving with him.

Can we wonder if the noted Russian traveller in Africa, Junker, in his writings compares the situation of the negro in the Eastern Soudan with that of the Russian peasant, very much to the disadvantage of the latter?

The Russian climate, too, is changing for the worse, and that again is partially responsible for the more and more frequent recurrence of deficient crops and famines. With denser population throughout the central portions and with the change of cultivation largely to cereal production, have gone hand in hand the destruction of the forests and the disappearance of the grassy steppes. The effect has been a twofold one: It has robbed the climate of much of its moisture and regular rains, thus producing frequent drouths, and it has deprived the rivers and springs of much of their regular sources of nourishment. This factor, though it has escaped the attention of the Russian government and even of the majority of Russian economical writers, can scarcely be overestimated. As in the United States (where its workings are being felt in large agricultural districts), this factor is a permanent one for Russia, and with greater administrative wisdom and less of wastefulness, it will require at best many years to offset the climatic and productive disadvantages carelessly brought on.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FAMOUS BLACK-EARTH BELT

Its Importance to the Nation—With it Russia Stands or Falls—General Recognition of this Fact by Russian Thinkers—This District Comprises Two-thirds of European Russia in Territory and One-half in Population—From the Most Fertile in the Whole of Europe it Has Sunk to a Land Agriculturally Exhausted—Taxes Cannot be Collected and Frequent Famines there Require Constant Government Aid—The Whole of this Belt Labours for Export of Wheat and Rye—The Province of Samara Furnishes a Striking Instance of Steadily Proceeding Exhaustion of the Soil—Some Facts and Figures—Causes for this Apparently Permanent Decline—What Novikoff, a High Government Official, Has to Say on the Subject—Apathy and Blind Obedience the Ruling Traits of the Peasantry—The Shark-like Rôle of the Orthodox Church—Is Russia Shifting her Centre?—Government Investigations and their Futility—The "Black-Earth Belt" within the Last Decade Has Agriculturally Remained behind Half a Billion of Roubles—A Notable Cry of Pain in the *Grashdanin*—What Will be the Result of Another Polish Revolution in Russia?

OCCASIONAL reference has been made throughout preceding chapters to Russia's famous "black-earth belt," but the subject is one of such vast importance and is so intimately connected with the causes that have led to her agricultural decline, as well as to the physical, economical, and moral degeneracy of

her peasant population, that it is deemed advisable to devote a special chapter to the subject.

In a country so vast, presenting such enormous differences in climatic and orographic conditions, there must of necessity be great differentiation in the economic situation of the population. In fact, despite the crass uniformity of the political system, what is true of certain parts of the Russian Empire applies by no means to every part of it. The contention is not made in this book that such frightful conditions as are seen in the Centre and portions of the East and South-east, prevail through the whole length and breadth of the country. There are large districts in Russia which enjoy relative or absolute prosperity and which are free wholly or in part from the awful economic and moral curses which the world has come to connect with the name of Russia.

Those portions, for instance, which are known, respectively, as Little Russia and New Russia are very different from the Centre. They suffer much less from communal joint ownership; there the constriction due to that system has been largely discarded, if not legally at least by actual practice. In Little Russia joint tax responsibility of the commune has never existed, and does not exist to-day; this is owing to the different historical development of those portions of the empire, annexed by Russia at a comparatively recent time. A very large German immigration has there contributed to healthier conditions of agriculture. The average

well-being is there far greater than in the Centre, and occasional failures in the crop have not even approximately such deleterious effects. They are border districts, and the traffic with adjoining western countries has had a beneficial result. There are, besides (leaving out of consideration the border provinces), other portions of Russia proper economically more advanced and prosperous than the central portions. Bessarabia and Podolia, the Crimea and the Tauridis are among these, and sections of Western Siberia are also in a promising condition. Central Asia under Russian sway has made decided economic progress. Taking these facts in their entirety, it would seem as if Russia's case, agriculturally considered, were by no means desperate.

However, it must be borne in mind that the "black-earth belt" is the very heart of Russia; when the heart is unsound, how can the body be well and strong? The "black-earth belt" is the Russian fastness, politically, economically, and morally. Its life, be it high or low, must in the nature of things determine and shape in the main the life of the nation. Were the core once irretrievably rotten and impoverished, Russia could not hope to rise again to affluence and health. Almost without exception Russian thinkers are recognising this fact. The government, culpably blind as it has been for several generations, has at last waked to the truth. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to show actual conditions in this "black-earth belt."

By the "black-earth belt" is meant three regions of European Russia. The first of these, the so-called Centre, comprises a territory of about 170,000 square miles with fourteen and one-half million inhabitants. To the east of this lie the Volga lowlands, in point of culture, racial characteristics, and general economic conditions differing but slightly from the Centre. Together these two territories form a complex about 460,000 square miles in size, with twenty-five and one-half millions of population. To the south extends the large stretch of New Russia, and to the south-west Little Russia. Both differ from the Centre in several respects. They, too, are peopled by the Great Russian race, and though Little Russia speaks a dialect of its own and has a separate literature scarcely inferior in quality and peculiar charm to that of Russia proper, still, in character and ideals the distinction is not very marked. Together these last-named territories comprise some 165,000 square miles, with a population of nineteen and one-half millions. To the north-east lie separate tracts which likewise belong to the "black-earth belt" and which show conditions assimilating those of the Centre. But these latter are not of sufficient importance to be grouped under our head. Roughly speaking, therefore, we have here to deal with a district of about 625,000 square miles and some forty-five million inhabitants, in point of population nearly two-fifths of the whole, and forming the dominant factor in Russia's policies, internal and external.

This "black-earth belt" was once—and not so long ago—the most fertile perhaps in the whole of Europe. In the North and East it is slightly hilly, and in the South and South-west it is a flat, treeless steppe. The deposit of rich, black, loamy soil is of considerable thickness and compares favourably with the finest prairie land in the United States and Canada, and with the bottom lands along the Lower Mississippi. It ought to be (and in a certain sense still is) the great cereal belt of Europe. By rights it ought to yield not only abundant nourishment to its native population, but millions upon millions of tons for export. Nature has acted wisely enough in making this district the nucleus of Russia's greatness; it ought to be the heart supplying rich blood to the arteries of the empire. Man has made of it a festering sore.

All expert reports agree in one thing: the soil of the "black-earth belt" shows serious signs of exhaustion. In varying degree the valuable chemical properties of the earth have diminished. Crop failures, wholly or in part, appear to be the direct outcome of this exhaustion. Lokhtin claims this. Nearly every other authority, in scientific works or in the reports made to the central government or the *zemstva* (provincial chambers), agrees with him. Among those who have demonstrated this clearly are such Russian authorities as Golovine, Schwanebach, Novikoff, Issayeff, Simkovitch, Keussler, Yermoloff, Engelmann, Milukoff, and others. Government ex-

perts, sent to investigate the phenomenon of the recurrence of deficient crops and famines in this once most fertile region of Russia, reported in a similar sense. The finance minister, M. de Witte, alone opposes this unanimous opinion, possibly for reasons of his own. He lays the blame for the famines which have become a regular institution in Central Russia on unfavourable weather, drouth, rain, or frost, and he does not say a word in his two budget reports of 1898 and 1899 about the causes leading to such meteorological conditions, although these causes are precisely the main thing, and the weather which they occasion but their inevitable consequence. Witte's statements and explanations in this matter would be indeed laughable were the subject not such a serious one. The veriest tyro in agriculture cannot fail to appreciate these causes. For centuries the Russian noble and peasant have been doing predatory farming. The soil has never received any manure. The layer of rich humus, inexhaustible as it seemed, has gradually lost its fertile qualities. Since the emancipation of the serfs the one-crop system has been followed. Wheat, wheat, nothing but wheat. To-day, the traveller rushing on the wings of steam from St. Petersburg through the vast plain on to Odessa, to the shores of the Black Sea, sees nothing but one immense waving wheatfield stretching endlessly along both sides of the railroad. Back of him the horizon is marked by a dim line trembling in the wind, and before him another such trembling line, as far as eye can reach.

Wheat, wheat, nothing but wheat. It is the one-crop system. Witte has forced the Russian peasant and noble to adhere to this system, suicidal as it is in the long run.

The facts are stronger than any official misrepresentation by Witte. For the crop failure of 1897 there were plenty of official data, clearly attributing that misfortune to soil exhaustion.

Here is a striking illustration. The Moscow *Vyedomosti* in 1898 contained a full report, based entirely upon official sources, of the rapidly proceeding exhaustion of the soil in the huge Volga district, a couple of decades before in a virgin state, and now, under the pitilessly pursued robber system of the Russian farmer, already deficient in nutritive elements. This report gave figures which tell the story plainly. For the large province of Samara (belonging to this Volga district) the figures of 1883 to 1892, when compared with those considered normal a decade before, show yields as follows:

Average normal yield for the preceding decade: Winter wheat, 31 pood per dessyatine, against 27.6 for 1883–1892; 34.7 for spring wheat, against 25.5; 41.7 for rye, against 30.4; 33.8 for oats, against 26.5; 33.5 for barley, against 18.7; 301.9 for potatoes against 213.6.

This, then, shows an average falling off in the yield of the main cereals (potatoes included) of about thirty per cent., in some cases (such as barley and spring wheat) even more; and all this within the space of just ten

years. Truly, Witte is convicted of misrepresentation out of the mouths of his own officials. The same deductions can be made from similar comparative figures in the adjoining provinces along the Volga bottoms, and due to precisely the same causes of unwise agriculture. Under these circumstances it is also quite evident that government financial aid to the starving in years of wide-spread famine can only be a makeshift, a palliative of temporary effect. With such aid the roots of the evil are not touched. The world must expect to meet the fact of a starving Russia at frequent intervals, so long as no effort is made in a thorough and methodical way of eliminating the evil itself, that is, the exhaustion of this once immensely fertile belt. Of course, the climatic changes due to the wholesale devastation of forests (brought about by the lack of other fuel for the industrial establishments in rural districts and by the rising prices for timber), and the disappearance of the steppe in European Russia, also play a large part in the regularly recurring deficiency of crops.

This very district along the Volga, settled as a whole only since a generation or two, and originally of unparalleled fertility, was the main seat of the pitiless famine of 1901. Its area of three hundred thousand square miles and eleven million population was at that time one vast poorhouse, such as S. Kovalevski (a high government official) described it in his great work (written in French and published in Paris), and as the two authors of *Starving Russia*, Lehmann and Parvus,

painted it on the strength of personal investigation extending over the whole territory in question. Conditions were found which have scarcely ever been equalled in horror even in India during periods of excessive famine. Whole villages of five thousand population and over were found with everybody hidden away in hovels, lying prone on the bare clay floor, in utter destitution, men, women, and children in the throes of starvation; village upon village where even rats and mice had disappeared because of lack of food, and where cats and dogs had starved to death along with their human masters. In many of these villages throughout the long winter the inhabitants had made systematic attempts to cease from eating and drinking by imitating the hibernating slumber of the bear, lying in a stupor on their miserable couches, moving as little as possible, and dozing days and nights, in order to reduce to a minimum the vital functions.

The purely agricultural provinces of the Centre and East during the last ten years have, generally speaking, regularly approximated at intervals such frightful conditions.

How are the peasantry in Russia to prosper against such an endless chain of adversities? The Russian peasant has never been taught to work properly. He labours in a half-hearted way, lacks steadiness and persistence; he does not like to work for several days in succession, and never has ideas or purposes taking into account conditions weeks or months hence. The fre-

quency of Russian holidays has bred him to this unprofitable manner of toiling, and his natural indolence has also something to do with it. His labour is superficial, never thorough, and agriculture is precisely a form of employment which will not tolerate this. Thoroughness indeed, and indefatigable labour at critical periods of the year, are chief requisites in a successful tiller of the soil. These same deficiencies of character are marked in the Russian noble, just as they are in the whole nation. The richest cereal lands of Europe have unfortunately been confided to the hands of a nation less gifted for agriculture than almost any other in Europe. Thus it is, too, that the productiveness of agriculture, considered acre per acre, is less in Russia than in all countries to the west. And all this has a demoralising effect; it emasculates the people. The Russian is not made to progress individually, a fact which nobody better than his own government has recognised for centuries. He must be driven and pushed. Witte stated this in bald terms in a memorial, since often quoted, to the present Czar, Nicholas II. The Russian moves *en masse*, not as an individual; he is best in the *artel* (co-operative association), as a member of the *volost* (the commune), working at the bidding of the authorities.

A part of Novikoff's illuminating report about Russian rural conditions (and heretofore referred to) gives a clear insight into this feature of Russian life. In it he says:

The general complaints about the lack of order and cleanliness in our villages, the poverty of the peasant, his savagery, the poor quality of the village authorities and those of the *volost*, the doings of the *kulak*—all this has the same root: It is the habit of external compulsion, to which the peasant has been inured for centuries past, and which has deprived him of every trace of initiative and individual enterprise.

Formerly it was the passive, unquestioning obedience to the master who owned body and soul; now it is the same kind of obedience to the policeman, the *zemski natchalnik* (influential official controlling peasant affairs in each province), etc., and finally the same kind of obedience shown towards the *volost* and the village authorities, but never a personal will of his own. This enervates the character of the masses, as it also incites the exceptional men among them, the *kulaks*, to abuse their strength in dealing with such a mollusc-like mass. This passive obedience has made a good soldier of the Russian peasant, the kind of soldier we know: blindly obedient, freezing to death on the Shipka Pass, because he has been put there as a sentinel and forgotten by his superior officers; he must be killed, man by man, in battle, because, even if beaten, he does not easily retire or run away, so long as the order has not been given.

But the same qualities which are virtues in a soldier are grave defects in a free labourer, at least if these virtues are part and parcel of his individual character. The lack of self-dependence is a leading Russian trait, and even assuming that there was a time when it was not, historical development has deeply ingrained it in

the Russian soul. And this historical development, this education to indolence and want of will-power by means of subjection and a poor system of government, is still going on. Even to-day, Church and State are of opinion that it is far better to remind the peasant of the sacredness of the Church and of the authority of the State by increasing his holidays, than to inure him to hard and steady work by decreasing the number of these holidays and by encouraging sobriety in keeping him away from the governmental vodka monopoly shop. Indeed, far more than the nobleman, his whilom master, ever did, Russian bureaucracy of to-day extinguishes every spark of manhood in the Russian peasant.

An exhausted soil, an enfeebled body, a labouring capacity weakened by State and Church regulations, a spiritual and material civilisation which has remained stagnant for five hundred years—these are given facts which make competition with other countries extremely hard, almost impossible, for Russian agriculture. And on the part of the State, as we have seen, nothing is done to strengthen this deficient productivity; rather the contrary. The increasing number of holidays means an enormous loss to the country in the case of a people numbering one hundred and thirty millions. To express this loss in figures is almost an impossibility in a country where governmental statistics are so defective and irregular, as well as slow, as is the case in Russia. As to the latter point the fact speaks volumes that seven years have gone since the last national census, and only

a small portion of its facts and figures have up to now become available. But taking the lowest estimates made by Russian statisticians, the economic loss to the nation owing to the average of one hundred and fifty holidays in the year for the Russian peasant, must be fully four hundred million roubles per year. This is only the direct money loss, whereas the indirect losses in material and moral forces are much greater, but even this money loss plays a great figure in a country whose financial system is of such a peculiar nature, compelling greatly excessive export.

The policy of the Russian government has been, and still is, to introduce additional holidays even in those parts of the Empire where the Orthodox Church is in a small minority, such as Roman Catholic Poland, Protestant Baltic German provinces, and so forth. There, too, the people are now obliged (under Pobyedonostseff's zealous proselytising system) to observe many more holidays, all of them taken from the calendar of the Orthodox Church. It is the old short-sighted policy of the Russian government. Formal religious observances must be promoted by all means, and incidentally the peasant must be made to consume as much as possible of the government monopoly vodka, yielding a large revenue to the state treasury.

In addition to this there is the ever-hungry maw of the Church. Its recognised policy in this respect is to encourage the peasant in making voluntary gifts to pope, *diakon*, and for church building or preserving

purposes. A realistic sketch appearing some time ago in a journal printed in Perm describes this to the life. The scene is laid in the village of Voskressenskoie, a large and populous one, and on the appointed day pope and diakon receive their peasant guests, about a thousand of them. *Batooshka* (Little Father) receives them smilingly. He is prepared for them, having laid in casks and bottles holding about eighty gallons of vodka. His guests appear with huge bundles of gifts —bread, flour, fuel, tea, sugar, preserves, dried fruit, honey, hides, mead, fruit brandy, self-woven linen, and embroideries. Waggonloads of timber, kindling wood, wheat, and rye are left at his door. The peasants are encouraged by their affable shepherd to drink, and they fully avail themselves of the opportunities. With every new glassful the guests become more liberal, and when they leave, reeling on their way homeward, not a kopek is left in their pockets. The "shepherd" has fleeced his flock, and he feels correspondingly happy; on the day after his flock does not feel quite the same way. It is stated in this same paper that in these drunken revels at the pope's house the peasants often quarrel, and that on their way home many a murder has been committed. Truly, a delectable picture.

That famines in this "black-earth belt" have become frequently recurring disasters there is no longer any denial. Experience teaches it, even if opinion as to the causes differs. Lokhtin counts seven famine years between 1885–1899. Schwanebach only five

within 1888–1901, that is, famines so bad that the government had to remit taxes on a large scale and keep by financial aid the population of this once fertile district from actual starvation. The famine of 1901 was particularly severe, as it hit the very districts which had greatly suffered by previous crop failures, those in the Central and Eastern provinces, though it also touched provinces previously not affected. Twenty-two provinces of the "black-earth belt" suffered among the worst. Seventeen provinces and several districts of Western Siberia received government aid. That year the South-western provinces were likewise affected to some extent, a proof that the soil there, too, is becoming exhausted. But general conditions in these latter provinces are still far superior to those of the Centre, and misery there was neither so great nor so lasting. There are reserve capital and reserve breadstuffs in the South-west provinces, and peasant holdings average much higher in size than in the Centre.

Official investigations have been made again and again as to the cause of these famines. Unfortunately, with scarcely any exception, the investigators started out with preconceived opinions, with a bias so strong in favour of theories known to be palatable in St. Petersburg as to overcome the mass of tangible facts elicited. Facts which did not tally with these preconceived opinions were simply ignored or distorted, and the natural consequence was that the conclusions arrived at and expressed in these official reports by no means

harmonise with the data. Yet, even among this mass of practically misleading facts, there is a goodly proportion fully bearing out what has been stated heretofore in this chapter. The fact itself of the thorough impoverishment of the "black-earth belt" is admitted without equivocation. Three main causes for it are cited: The lack of all earnings save by agricultural labour; the enforced idleness during one-half of the year, and the excessive rate of taxation, taking away from this district much more in taxes than given back by the state in one form or another. This last point is undeniable. In the Central district an annual average of 106.4 million roubles is taken from the peasantry in taxes, and only 42.8 millions is returned in improvements, etc. For the East the taxes were 80 millions, and the returns 59.2 millions. But in the South we find similar figures, namely, 122.6 millions taken out, and only 64.8 millions returned. The rate is similar in other districts of European Russia. Largely this is due to the fact that Asiatic Russia swallows up an undue proportion of the national revenue. And the special argument of the government based on these figures is therefore hardly anything better than a fallacy. The reports throughout show a tendency towards mere mechanical remedies, giving a wide berth to the roots of the evil: The unwise system of agriculture, the joint ownership in land practised by the rural communities, and the total lack of initiative and self-help on the part of the peasant population.

The subject of tax arrears was briefly referred to before. This has been a standing item in the Russian budget for many years. Of course, the delinquents belong almost entirely to the peasant class. The latest available statistics demonstrate an increase in these arrears. The arrears in the redemption tax of the former serf class amounted on January 2, 1901, to 250 million roubles, about seventy per cent. of which fell to the share of the Centre and East. Precisely these districts had been assisted by the government with financial aid during the famine years of 1891–1892 with 162 millions; 1898, with 35 millions; 1901, with 10 millions; together, with 207 millions. Adding these 207 millions to the 250 millions arrears in the redemption tax and the 116 millions of other tax arrears, we arrive at a total of 573 millions which these districts, the "black-earth belt," have cost the government during the space of one single decade in tax deficiencies and in direct money aid. These figures, few as they are, speak volumes for the general state of destitution prevailing there.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that only the Centre and East are affected in this way. Even the South, particularly New Russia and Bessarabia, despite fertile soil, mild climate, and sparse population, have seen crop failures during the last few years so severe as to have shaken to its very base the prosperity of the peasant element. There, too, both cattle and horses have decreased, and there are thousands of holdings to-

day without a single head of cattle or horses, demonstrating that these luckless peasant proprietors have had to turn for help to government or provincial authorities, and in most cases they have had to leave cultivation of their acres to the enterprising *kulak*.

A summary of general agrarian conditions in Russia is contained in the report which Golovine, a noted national economist and a member of the Kovalevski commission before referred to, made to the government. He says:

> The brilliant façade of our economic situation is, therefore, hiding a very mean-looking backyard. On the one hand we see undoubted signs of development: the rapid growth of state revenues, the vivifying of our industry, the enlargement of our network of railroads, the steady if slow increase of railroad receipts in spite of the lowering of passenger tariffs, and lastly, our increasing exports. On the other hand, we see the decrease of harvests in the centre of the country, precisely in its most fertile districts, and at the same time the evident indications of a steadily advancing pauperisation of our two agricultural classes: growing tax arrears on the part of the peasants and growing indebtedness of our landed proprietors, rapid increase in the ranks of the agricultural proletariat, stagnation of our interior trade, and finally—as a result of all this—the stationary condition of the population of the Russian Centre.

Novikoff, whom we have heard before, refers to a series of articles on agricultural conditions in the heart of Russia which appeared in the *Grashdanin*, a journal widely read throughout Russia and of recognised conservative and nationalistic tendency. He quotes among others the following passage:

Our contemporary agricultural life in Russia, peasant as proprietor, is a complete non-sense and surrounded with impenetrable darkness. These immense distances without passable communication of any kind, yet penetrated by elegantly constructed railroad tracks; these rural palaces falling into decay and standing in the midst of layer after layer of straw huts, one attached to the other; this fat soil which does not even return what is put into it; these antediluvian implements, whereby the horses are fairly slaughtered; these half-starved horses and cows grazing on arid meadows; this pious and devout people, making holidays out of 150 days in the year, when nothing is done but hard drinking and sleeping; these churches which do not improve morals; these schools which do not even teach the art of writing; these provinces and districts, welded together in a haphazard way out of populations and parties which hate one another; this lonesomeness on the desolate wastes of meagre fields; this intellectual hunger which is gradually increased by physical hunger; this all-pervading sentiment of enmity, of the crassest egotism, of nameless terror, and the groan of the Russian ploughman wafted by the wind to north, south, west, and east, sighing: "Save thyself if thou canst!" —is not that a non-sense, an absurdity, when we recall the fact that Russia is an independent and agricultural land, and that the Russian is well-meaning, capable, and enduring? But if the root is rotten, the branches will not thrive.

And Novikoff adds in comment: "Reading this, one shudders, and the doubt for a moment arises whether all this is truth. But alas, all who are living in villages, all of us who love our country sincerely, feel and know that the writer, if he laid on vivid colours, is unquestionably in the right."

Of course, M. de Witte is perfectly familiar with these plaints. He himself makes the calculation in his budget report of 1903 that the deficiency in agricultural returns brought about by the crop failures during the

preceding five years, amounts to a clear billion roubles. Nevertheless, sticking to his old text, he reiterates his satisfaction at the satisfactory revenues of the government and the rapid growth of expenditures, arriving at the conclusion, "that in the general welfare of the country no decrease is noticeable." If we should set out to figure up all the losses which Russian industry has met with during the same lustrum, we should arrive just about at another lost billion. And is it credible that Russia has lost such enormous sums within a mere five years without suffering in her welfare?

Moreover, is it feasible to cure conditions such as those sketched above by tax remittances and financial government aid?

And yet the conditions outlined in the foregoing concern Great Russia, a group of provinces forming, as was pointed out, the very backbone of the whole Empire. If things proceed at this present pace, the financial, intellectual, and moral centre and radiating point of Russia must shift elsewhere. But will not that destroy the cohesion of the Empire? Hitherto the political forces of Russia were in the main concentrated in the eighty-six millions of Russians, and the non-Russian elements, numbering about forty-four million, were useful indeed in forming the leaven in this huge mass, the vital principle energising it and pushing it on the path of progress, but were certainly not the determining factors.

On the other hand, we shall see that it has been

Russia's persistent policy to attempt the Russification of all her non-Russian elements, by means foul or fair. It will be seen that she has estranged from herself, one by one, all the progressive and more enlightened fragments of her population of foreign blood, doing her level best to stamp out the autonomy of these outlying provinces, and lowering their intellectual and economic standard. By dint of persistent effort, employing all the forces of brute power, superior numbers, cunning persuasion, and tyrannic measures, Russia has succeeded to a very large extent in her purpose. So well indeed, that in all her border provinces the native non-Russian population, forming the large majority, is distinctly disaffected, nay, politically hostile to Russia proper. The fact that these disaffected provinces are precisely those of most account, both in wealth and in intellect, makes the case fraught with all the more danger.

The interests of state and nation have grown to be divergent. Let a storm come, one such, let us say, as the Polish Revolution of 1863, and what will the outcome be?

What, indeed, can Russia do in the present circumstances to heal this wound in her very vitals, a wound so deep and cancerous that ordinary remedies must fail?

## CHAPTER VII

### DECAY OF THE NOBILITY

**A Striking Parallel with the Former Southern Slaveholders in the United States—Patriarchal Conditions under the Old Régime, Suddenly Superseded by Wholly Modern Ones—The Russian Nobility Proved its Incapacity to Adapt themselves to New Conditions—"Easy Money" Furnished by the Government Proves the Ruin of the Estate Owners—One Billion and a Half of Roubles Squandered within Twenty Years by the Russian Nobility—Terpigoreff's Realistic Tales Show the Process of Degeneration—One-third of the Titled Landowners Driven off their Paternal Acres by Spendthrift Methods and Usury—Absenteeism Another Deplorable Feature—The Only Flourishing Estates in Russia Proper Are those of the Sugar Beet Raisers—The One-Crop System and the Decline of Cattle Breeding—The Central Government Unable to Stay the Nobility in their Downward Course**

AN interesting parallel might be drawn between the condition of the Russian nobility and that of the Southern aristocracy in the United States, both before and after the Civil War. It is more striking than would appear at first sight. The Russian noble was and is a large landholder. But the value of his property consisted in the main not in the land itself, but in the human chattels he owned. Just as the Southern

magnates, in the days before the great war, were reckoned as owners of so many hundreds or thousands, not of acres, but of slaves, so, too, the Russian nobles were spoken of as worth so many thousands of serfs. Just as on the plantations in Virginia black men and women were "raised" for the down-South markets of New Orleans, Natchez, and Charleston, so there was a lively industry of similar description on many large Russian estates. We get an inkling of this in Gogol's famous realistic tale, *Dead Souls*, and another Russian writer still more to the point, Terpigoreff, tells us in one of his novels of a wealthy and noble Russian widow, owning vast estates in the province of Tamboff, who found the latter unprofitable and hence bought up for a song large tracts of fertile steppe lands in the Kirghiz country east of the Volga. To these she had taken thousands of her serfs, men, women, and children, all loaded down with shackles and chains, and turned them loose on this virgin soil to create wealth for her. The main wealth was the natural increase of these serfs, namely, children.

On their broad acres these Russian nobles had been living in true patriarchal fashion. Monarch of all he surveyed, the noble was not only the absolute lord of his more or less numerous herd of serfs—and their number, with many of the more powerful landowners, ran up into the twenty thousand, with not a few even into the fifty thousand and more—but he was the very impersonation of the government itself, an autocrat as absolute as the Czar, though on a smaller scale. If he

chose he could have any of his serfs whipped to death, and there was never a murmur. Within his family he was just as absolute. His children and the womenfolk trembled at the very sound of his voice when he happened to be in ill-humour. He could send any of his human chattels to Siberia in chains, or if so minded he could sell them. Of money he had little and recked less. What need of it for him? He had all that heart could desire on his own soil. His clever male serfs built his houses, stables, and barns; they carved and made his furniture, and they tilled his soil, harvested his crops, raised his cattle, slaughtered his swine, and did everything else that his needs required. His female serfs span and wove all the linen and cloth used. They attended to all the domestic industry that his estate called for. Some of the handiest of both sexes he sent to Moscow or St. Petersburg to learn a trade and perhaps set up in business for themselves. In that case they were bound to send him every year the *obrok* (head money), and thus he got some cash. When he did so he lost no time in spending it in riotous living in the nearest large town, perhaps losing it all in champagne and cards, or perhaps retaining enough to come home with a Persian rug or two or with some cases of wine. What could be more patriarchal than that? And what, by the way, could resemble more the life of some of the Southern large slaveholders before the War of Secession?

With this difference, however. The abolition of

slavery had been ventilated and advocated more or less for fifty years before it was finally brought about in the South. In Russia, where at the death of Nicholas I. serfdom seemed based as firm as the rocks, the blow came overnight, scarcely with any preparation. On February 19, 1861, Alexander II. issued his memorable ukase, and on that day every one of the fifty million serfs became a freeman, and could go whither he pleased. Some of the Russian writers, Terpigoreff particularly, tell us of the chaos that succeeded the emancipation of the serfs. The Russian nobles were stunned and dazed. It took them years to accustom themselves to the very thought of the enormous change wrought in the entire social fabric of Russia. In that respect again the parallel with the South holds good. There are living even to-day thousands of Russian nobles with their thoughts entirely in the past. Certainly, it will require generations to pull them out of their slough of despond, and it may never be done.

True, the government did not take away their serfs without a form of payment. The government took away some of their land and all of their human chattels and gave them in return money. This money took the shape of redemption bonds. These bonds the former owner of the serfs and of the land could sell to banks, speculators, or usurers for cash—at a discount, of course.

Now, what happened was this: The nobles, never having been used to money, in nine cases out of ten

were in a thoroughly bewildered condition. Serfs or free labour they had none, for the emancipated peasants for several years after they had become freemen (again exactly as happened in the South) disliked intensely resuming work for their former lords, and preferred tasting the delights of town in haphazard labour, or else wandering about the country in droves, vagrant-fashion. So, then, the noble saw his property go to waste and ruin. To escape the irksome situation he took the large sums of money received in payment of his land and serfs, sums which at the time seemed inexhaustible to him, and with his family went, nabob-fashion, to reside abroad, where within a couple of years he squandered it, and then returned, a thoroughly broken man, to his ruined homestead. A few endeavoured to be wiser. They went to St. Petersburg, tried to get into the government service, and had their children educated for the same career. But they, too, did not build as wisely as they thought. The roots of their being remained in the paternal acres, and transplantation slowly killed them, morally for a certainty, physically likewise in most cases.

Truly, the case of the Russian noble is a hard one, and one must needs give him a small share of one's sympathy.

This period of demoralisation and chaotic conditions lasted for a few years with some, for many years with others. There is no telling how many thousands of Russian nobles, *kniazes* princes) some of them, descended

from Rurik's line, have gone to the dogs, body and soul, in consequence of serf emancipation. In any event, the number of these has been very considerable. Some of the oldest and historically most renowned Russian families have been wiped out completely, or decimated, in the process, such as the Troubetzkois, Belskys, Lvoffs, and others. It was a rude demonstration of the survival of the fittest, strictly according to Darwinian methods. And when we look at statistics, plain enough as the tale is which they tell, they lack the human element. They do not show us the tears of blood shed by these men and women and children raised in affluence and bred in absolute disdain of money.

It is a modern tale of the curse of slavery, more dramatic and on a larger scale by far than that which the former slaveholding States in North America tell. And of all the slaveholding aristocracy that history knows of, the Russian nobility was worst equipped by fate to grapple with the new and tremendous problem it was called upon to solve. They were economically perfectly unprepared, and were thrust out from an antiquated system of patriarchal economic conditions into the modern system based on money values, and purchase and sale. Another point: the Slav is hospitable in the extreme, and lavish in expenditure without a thought of the morrow; of all the Slavs the Russian most so. By nature he is a poor agriculturist, and on exactly even conditions will always be beaten by his western competitors. We have already seen that the peasant,

partly by reason of historical development, partly by inherent deficiencies, is not capable of intense and steady work. Yet it is this very peasant upon whom the Russian noble must always rely for labour.

During the long period succeeding purely chaotic conditions created by serf emancipation, the Russian noble has tried, with frequent lifts given him by his government in the shape of "easy money," to make something out of himself. But it is a deplorable fact that save in relatively few cases he has failed. For foremen and managers he hired on contracts of long duration Germans from the Baltic provinces or from Germany proper. These men, as a rule, could accomplish nothing with the only labour at hand, the Russian peasant. Being Protestants, they did not sympathise with the enormous number of holidays enjoined on the peasant by the Orthodox Church and State. Still, in the main, they have done better as overseers and executive officials for the Russian noble than probably anybody else could have done. For one thing, they were honest, and did not steal as Russian and Polish foremen were in the habit of doing. The system in vogue, that of securing labour in the spring and summer, until the close of the harvest, is in itself a precarious one, and never furnishes reliable results. Instead of a drove of three hundred or six hundred peasants hired by contract, often but two hundred or even one hundred of them will show up, the others having gone off to another estate offering a kopek or two more per

day. The owners themselves to this day know next to nothing of rational agriculture. The expensive machinery they began to lay in when they had plenty of money, harvesters, ploughs, harrows, and other implements worked by steam or horse, were beyond their comprehension. Thousands of these pieces of costly machinery, at first imported from England or Germany, later on from the United States, lie dust-covered and in fragments in Russian outbuildings, having caused only a waste of money and time.

Practically the only class of large landholders in Russia in a more or less flourishing condition to-day are those who have taken up beet culture. The rural distilleries, for a time yielding handsome revenues, have of late been wiped out by the effects of the government monopoly in the sale of vodka. It was not so with beet culture. Beet sugar production has become an important branch of Russian agriculture. This has brought about intensive cultivation on a number of large estates. Somehow, too, these Russian beet growers have developed quite a bit of commercial talent. They have joined in with the sugar trust in Russia, have exerted considerable pressure on the government, even on Witte, and are "shearing their sheep" in goodly fashion, that is, are obtaining very good prices for their beets and sugar. Of course, the consumer has to pay for it. Sugar of Russian make costs in Russia thrice what it does outside of Russia.

Then as to the banks. Despite the experience the

government had had, showing clearly that the Russian noble could no more be trusted with large amounts of money than could a small child, the same remedy was tried again and again to help the demoralised landowner to his feet. In 1874 the huge Land Mortgage Bank was founded with the aid of government funds and under government control. But the noble was so ignorant of money affairs that he merely looked upon this as a charitable institution. He considered loans purely in the nature of gifts from the Little Father in St. Petersburg, and no idea ever entered his head of repaying such loans. Thus, additional thousands of nobles went to the wall. In 1886 and again in 1894, after the above bank had been abolished, the government engaged in similar enterprises. But the Nobles' Agrarian Bank and the Rural Agrarian Bank effected nothing more than their predecessors had. The titled landowners had not yet learned to make a wise use of money. In fact, they have n't learned it to this day. It is scarcely to be believed how even in this year of 1904 the Russian noble, as a type, is unsophisticated and childlike to a degree.

Then came the period of railroad building under Wishnegradsky and Witte. Again the Russian noble considered this a good opportunity for displaying his fancied financial talent. All through the provinces he joined stock companies. Not in one case in a thousand did he know anything whatever of their operations, but it was sufficient to his mind that his brother, or

Cousin Nikita, or his neighbour, Sergei Alexandrovitch, had been to Paris and there visited, once or twice, the Bourse. Nearly all these companies went under in successive financial crashes, and with them, of course, the money invested by the credulous nobles.

It is calculated that in this wise the Russian nobility have borrowed upon their estates and subsequently spent more or less foolishly a matter of about one and one-half billions of roubles. Since the beginning of the seventies it is estimated that about one-third of the entire nobility have disappeared from their estates, driven thence by usurers, creditors of a more reputable kind, or in consequence of sheer senseless wastefulness. It is estimated that the estates of the nobles, taking them as a whole, are mortgaged or otherwise debt-laden forty per cent. of their full value. The public lists of estates offered for auction sale in consequence of final decrees of the courts comprise all along thousands of names. Such sales are constantly held in every part of the empire, and they show not only the thorough rottenness of conditions but incidentally also a steady decline in the value of arable land. In some districts, including very fertile ones, the price of such land has shrunk by as much as fifty per cent. in comparison with prices forty years ago.

Of course, with so many thousands of noble landholders gone to the wall, the totality of estates of this description has also decreased enormously, territorially considered. In 1861 the Russian nobility owned 105

million dessyatines, and after serf emancipation this figure had been reduced to seventy-eight millions. By 1892 their holdings had dropped to fifty-seven millions. Since then there has been a steady decrease of just about one million dessyatines every year. To-day the nobility own only about forty per cent. of the land they did in 1861. The other sixty per cent. have passed into the hands of peasants, merchants, land usurers, and prosperous townspeople. Of the forty-six million dessyatines still remaining in their hands only some twenty-four millions are tilled soil, the remainder are forests and meadows.

This whole process of disintegration is vividly described in Russian literature of the past forty years, and the writings of Terpigoreff afford particularly graphic pictures of this kind. We meet in his realistic tales with two types, both evidently numerous and well-defined. The one ruins the nobleman, the other the peasant. The latter obtains advances on his crops for which he is made to pay usurious interest, losing thus, one by one, his horse, his cow, his chickens and pigs, and his entire crop. The nobleman is made to sell, on similar terms and under like circumstances, his horses and cattle, then his barns and stables, next his park or gardens, his orchard, the very furniture in his house, and lastly the house itself. Everything is carted off by the usurer; even the ancient oak walls and ceilings of his dwelling, curiously carved and stained with age, are taken to town by the creditor, and there fitted

together once more. The old furniture is placed where it stood before, and thus the very seat of ancient boyar splendour has been moved into the capital of the province or district, and in it sits the usurer, with fat paunch and twinkling eyes, while the former lord of the soil is begging somewhere for a little government position in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tver, or, failing that, in a prosperous province like Smolensk. In many cases, too, he has sunk to a lower level, become a confirmed drunkard and vagrant. Many of these one-time nobles have disappeared, nobody knows whither; probably they belong to the colonies of Russian adventurers and professional gamblers existing in the various capitals of Europe and also to be met with in such places as Monte Carlo, Baden-Baden, and elsewhere. The place where once the house stood is desolate. The ancient linden trees, formerly standing in majestic rows along the main pathway leading to the spacious manor-house, have been cut down, and the broad acres surrounding it have gone piecemeal to the peasants in the neighbouring villages. The meadows are leased or rented, and the fine forests farther off have been sold for timber and fuel. The worst in this respect are the provinces of Tamboff, Orel, Tula, but even in the immediate vicinity of Moscow may be found to-day hundreds of such dismantled or mangled estates.

One thing is particularly noticeable in all the Russian writings dealing with these conditions: the total lack of prudence, ordinary foresight, steadiness of character,

self-respect, and experience, and, on the other hand, the superabundance of credulity, soft-heartedness, carelessness, and want of scruples in taking and giving, the unsated power of enjoying all the good things of life, and the wide-hearted tolerance of indefensible men and conditions. Children of nature they are, mentally and in character still in their teens, and their thoughts do not go beyond the morrow. They have never learned to grasp facts clearly, nor to think of economy, of national economy least of all. The want of common prudence is so general with them that Western people are simply at a loss to comprehend it. If the Russian nobles as a class fairly represent the national character, no favourable prognostication can be made of the ultimate fate of the nation. Certainly, in that case the Russian will never acquire independence in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word.

During the reign of Alexander II. first attempts were made to educate the people, and more particularly its leaders, the nobility, to self-government and self-action. That monarch called into life the *zemstva* (provincial chambers), and made a serious effort to organise courts of law and legal administration. For it must be remembered that up to 1861 the nobility had ruled the peasantry, that is, the ninety-five per cent. of the nation, and that their will had been law, the only law, in the whole interior of the vast empire. Alexander II. since 1863 opened to the nobility these two fields of useful and financially profitable labour. The nobility

thronged particularly into all the places and offices created by the provincial institutions. But we will see elsewhere how the nobles, through faults of their own, lost and misused this opportunity. When provincial self-government dwindled, little by little, until it became a mere shadow, the nobility, too, were deprived of their lucrative offices. A new element, not of noble birth, but one which had learned to work in earnest, began to crowd out the nobles. This new element became for the nobility what the *kulak* was and is for the peasant. It has succeeded them not only in the ownership of their estates, but has also largely replaced them in every sphere of provincial and government service.

In the old days the nobleman did not raise on his great estates much more cereals than was needed for himself and his serfs. Fifty years ago, wheat, rye, oats, etc., were not worth much in Russia. A bushel of oats, for instance, was then worth about four or five cents, and wheat about twice that. Even at such low prices, purchasers were often scarce or not at all to be had. Of course, this was in pre-railroad days. Thus, cereal production on the whole was much less than nowadays in Russia, though consumption was much larger per head, owing to lack of export and to greater wealth of the population. Nevertheless, each estate raised something more in breadstuffs than was needed. There was always a reserve, and that came in very opportunely during years of deficient crops. Famine was

unknown then throughout the empire. Indeed, it was to the landholder's own profit to keep his serf, the peasant, in good physical condition, just as it was to the Southern slave-owner's interest to keep his black field hands in shape for work. Population was not so dense then, even in the "black-earth belt," and fertile steppe land, virgin soil, was cheap and near by. Whenever corn land showed signs of exhaustion, it was left fallow and new soil broken. The best of the wheat was sent to Moscow and St. Petersburg, to the mills; in sheep-raising districts the wool was sold, and cattle and horse breeding likewise brought in some money. The taxes were small, and cash expenditures seldom required.

But after the emancipation of the serfs, as we have seen, the trouble began. First there was a lack of labour, and next of money, and many thousands were ruined. Meanwhile, though, railroads were built, and the network of them became denser and denser. Freight rates were greatly reduced during Wishnegradsky's régime. The consequence was that it now began to pay to carry wheat from estates not too far (that is, not more than one hundred verst) from the railroad, to the nearest station, and to send it thence to an export harbour or across the frontier to western neighbouring nations. The time came when wheat was worth three times, yea, six times, what it had fetched formerly. The magnetic attraction of the Baltic export harbours reached as far as the broad

steppes beyond the Volga. And now the raising of cereals increased at gigantic strides. One piece of meadow or grazing land after another was transformed into a wheatfield, and thus it went on for years. Agricultural machinery was imported, and cereal production and export rose to unheard-of heights. Everybody saw a golden future stretching out endlessly. To-day the steppe praised in song and story, the fragrant and flower-decked steppe, extending as far as eye could reach, is gone in European Russia. Beyond the Asiatic frontier, on the other side of the Ural, it may be still seen. But in European Russia we now have nothing but waving grain fields from Tula and Orel down to the Black Sea, to the Volga and beyond. Private estates in the Russia of to-day are made up of new land far more than are peasant holdings. The latter, in fact, have been tilled for centuries, and the fields of the private landowner are, therefore, far more productive; usually they give double the quantity which peasant land does.

The one-crop system spread over the whole empire, and nothing was ever put back into the soil in lieu of what had been taken out of it. Formerly the cattle at least had been grazing in big herds, and even the pigs and horses had increased the fertility of the soil. But now these grazing lands disappeared, and with them the cattle, the horses, and the swine. Within the past twenty years alone the wealth of Russia in live stock, etc., has decreased by thirty-five per cent.,

whereas in all the other countries of Europe there has been a vast increase in this respect. To-day the Russian peasant as well as the landowner feed their stock on straw, for of hay there is scarcely any. Thus the fertility of the soil diminished gradually but surely. The more railroads were built, the more cereals were produced for export. And at last the climate, too, changed. The forests were gone, and so were the steppe and the meadows, and the absorbing power which had acted as a reservoir for the water of the country disappeared with them. Evaporation now proceeds at a rapid rate. The melting snow of the spring, the rain of summer and fall, now rush headlong over the land to the nearest river-bed, devastating the fields and carrying off valuable chemical properties of the soil, instead of, as formerly, nourishing the latter. Drouth and crop failures became regular features of Russia, and they will continue to be.

Between 1870 and 1890 there had been an almost unbroken succession of plentiful harvests, and prices had ruled high. Then came the reaction. The famines of 1891 and 1892 had scarcely passed, and had been followed by another three years of large crops, when cereals fell, dating from 1894, all over the world. The fat years had not been utilised wisely by the Russian landholder. In his old lavish way he had squandered his money, nay, had even piled mortgage on mortgage on his land, the Agrarian Bank making this an easy matter for him. In very rare cases only had he saved

any capital. An exception must be made in favour of the beet grower in the South and South-west. As mentioned before, sugar beet raising is made very profitable by the Russian government. The owners of that sort of estate, besides, showed wisdom in introducing intensive methods of agriculture. On some of them as much as three hundred thousand and even five hundred thousand bushels of wheat are raised. But the forests were cut down in that whole region, for coal there was none, and the boilers had to be heated with cord-wood.

Another factor entered into the changing conditions of the landowners, namely, absenteeism. Scarcity of capital to work their estates properly, the prevailing insecurity in obtaining required help, and in many cases the want of modern implements, particularly agricultural machinery, drove the landowners off their estates into the government or provincial service. This made them absentees, and compelled them to rent or lease, in many cases even to sell in instalments piece after piece of their land to the peasantry. Of course such land was misused even worse than the communal lands of the peasants, and within a short time, it, too, showed signs of exhaustion. Whenever and wherever the degree was reached that the land no longer could be profitably worked, it was allowed to lie fallow and soon was a waste, entirely covered with weeds. Taking all these facts together, and it will not seem astonishing that the Russian nobility is on the down-grade. But even where their lands have passed into the hands of

other owners, moneyed men of the towns, merchants and the like, the land has not profited by the change. The same old wasteful methods were pursued by the new owners, it being only a question of getting out of the soil as much as possible in as short a time as convenient. The only change for the better has been in such cases where the peasant has been able to raise enough money to buy land of his own, or where the young and progressive sons of landholders have settled down on the diminished paternal acres. The number of those belonging to the last-named two categories is increasing, but is not yet large enough to play any considerable figure.

The same remark applies to those owners of estates who have introduced rational agricultural methods, such as are in vogue in countries to the west. With the exception of the sugar beet raising the number of such owners is not large, although it may be surmised that it will steadily increase, for during the last two decades a beginning has been made by the government in founding agricultural colleges where sensible and scientific methods of soil cultivation are taught. Furthermore, the number of young Russians, sons of unprogressive landholders, who are sent to study agriculture abroad is growing.

The general conditions for a passing from extensive and slovenly methods of agriculture to intensive and rational ones are not favourable in Russia to-day. But this change is bound to come, nevertheless, for it is the

only salvation. Nothing else will accomplish the redemption of the soil for the titled and untitled landholder there. The present system of never using any manure on the fields and meadows was only possible for any length of time while plenty of new land could be had cheap. That is the case no longer. The one-crop system must be broken with, or Russian agriculture is doomed. These two facts seem to result clearly from all that can be learned reliably about the present state of agrarian Russia. Persistence in the old and senseless method will within a few years bring the Russian tiller of the soil to the point where his labour no longer pays. In fact, that point has already been reached in the case of millions of peasants and landholders. They do not get sufficient out of the soil to yield them a decent living, or any living at all, and they have to make up the deficiency, the one, the landholder, by holding official positions at a salary, and the other, the peasant, by labouring in town through the year or part of it, leaving the tilling of his strip of land to his family.

But it will be a very hard matter for both peasant and landholder to effect this change; hardest, of course, for the peasant, as we have seen in the chapter devoted to him. Yet the Russian landholder is in some respects even inferior to the former serf, for the habit of indolence is deeply ingrained in him, and his spendthrift nature will make economy extremely difficult to him. With that the Russian noble has been accustomed ever since the emancipation of the serfs to look to his gov-

ernment, central or provincial, for financial aid in all his troubles, thus rendering the growth of a healthy sentiment of self-help impossible. It is indeed hard to conceive how he will ever rid his mind of this bent. An excellent book written by Engelhardt, a Russian from the Baltic provinces, gives a clear insight into the peculiar state of mind of the present land-holding noble. The book shows, among other things, the extreme backwardness of the titled landholder's ideas regarding agriculture, and yet it concerns itself mainly with one of the more advanced and prosperous provinces, namely, Smolensk. The Russian newspapers and magazines are teeming with articles and communications from this class of rural proprietors containing all sorts of advice how to cure the evils of Russian agriculture. In almost every instance these cogitations and counsels are puerile and unsophisticated to an almost laughable degree, but even many of the Russian government reports are not much better in this respect, and not a few of the resolutions passed and the proceedings had by the *zemstva* are of similar childlike simplicity.

Such radical changes as Russian agriculture needs would tax the brain and the energies of an Anglo-Saxon nation to the utmost—how then is the childlike Russian to accomplish them? The government alone, even if it were so minded, of which there is no indication, is powerless to carry out such a sweeping reform. It will require hard and steady work, together with

considerable intellect, to effect it. And that is precisely, as we have seen, where the main trouble lies. The liquor monopoly exerted by the government in Russia has rendered the rural estates even less profitable than they were before, for it has destroyed the small rural distilleries, and the government during the last few years has built some five hundred vodka refineries, thus robbing the landholders of the profit there was in that. The breeding of cattle and horses has developed in Finland, in the Baltic provinces, in Poland, even in Siberia, in exact proportion to the dwindling of this rural industry in Central Russia. The districts beyond the Volga, particularly the one of Orenburg, used to be much given to the raising of horses, but these studs have now entirely disappeared. How greatly the fertility of the "black-earth belt" has suffered, results clearly from the fact that though the territory devoted to the raising of cereals within it has enormously enlarged during the past twenty years, the yield per acre has steadily diminished. The government report of M. Nerucheff, based on laboriously obtained data and published in the St. Petersburg *Vyedomosti*, shows this beyond doubt.

The outlook for the Russian landholder, as well as for the entire Russian agriculture, is the blackest possible. One turns in vain to all the obtainable sources of information for something which would look like a thorough remedy.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHURCH AND MORALS

Relations of the Clergy with the People—From the Recollections of a Village Priest—"Drink, *Batooshka*, Drink!"—The Priest's Sole Diversion in the Country Is Vodka—Insufficient Means of Income and Debasing Surroundings—Figures from the Budget of the Holy Synod—Striking Contrast between the Russian Priest *in partes infidelium* and the One Left at Home—His Most Meritorious Work the Hunting Down and Conversion of Renegades and Sectarians—The Holy Synod has Always Money for Proselytising Ventures—Official Statistics Regarding Vice and Crime in Russia Scarce and Unreliable—But Recent Russian Literature Holds up the Mirror to Life—Among the Peasantry are Noticeable Two Main Facts, namely, the Loosening of the Marriage Tie and the Decrease of Maternal Affection and Sentiment of Duty—Frightful Infant Mortality—The Unstable Conditions of Russian Peasant Life largely Responsible—Apathy of the Orthodox Church Bears also Much of the Blame—Russian Sects—People of the Old Faith, the Stundists, the Molokhans, and Dukhoborzis—The British Bible Society First Introduces the Gospels in Russian to the Masses—Pashkoff and his Followers—A Remarkable Type of the Modern Russian Christian—Despite all Persecution a Steady Increase in Russian Sectarianism

IN the *Reminiscences of a Village Pope*, a book written some time ago and containing an unvarnished account of conditions under which the Russian clergy of

the Orthodox Church have to pass their lives, we find a series of interesting pictures. These pictures are not flattering to Russian culture.

The new pope arrives at the village to which he has been assigned by his superiors. He finds no inn, no hospitable reception, absolutely no preparation made for him and his family. "Where is the sexton?" he asks. A tumble-down hovel is pointed out. "And the verger?" Another hovel, still worse, is shown him. The new pope and his family in their *kibitka* drive to the church and find it small, unsteady, and out of repairs, surrounded by a rotten wooden fence. The guardhouse of the verger is built against one of the corners of the church. That, too, is in the last stages of decay. They enter it, and find the floor mere clay, the two windows half an *arsheen* (about fourteen inches) high and broken; the walls are dripping with moisture, the corners encrusted with green mould. Of course, the pope cannot stay here; he must look around for an asylum, and nobody even offers to help him find one. At last he finds a refuge for himself and family for the night with a peasant whose *izba* has two rooms. One of these the new pope is given until the morning, and his wife and four children have to sleep on moss couches covered with sheepskin.

Then begins the most diplomatic part of every new pope's dealings with his congregation, the negotiations for a suitable abode to be given him and his family. Every congregation is supposed to supply free quarters,

but the latter are in most instances not a whit better than the average peasant hut. Even to obtain them costs a great deal of persuasion and weeks of preliminary eloquence on his part.

After innumerable prayers, polite salutations, and painful abasements on my side [says our village pope in his record], and a great deal of haughty instructions and counter arguments on the part of the members of the congregation, I was a fortnight later summoned to appear before the communal assembly, the *mir*, there to beg them formally for suitable quarters. Long, long I had to urge and argue here, and had to turn personally to almost every member present, pleading hard with them. A last, after hours of persuasion on my part, they listened to my prayers. I was told to move into the house of a peasant in tolerable circumstances. But one single room for me and my family was all they gave me.

In their new quarters the pope and his wife have to submit to new humiliations on the part of their hosts. At tea time appears the sexton, but he is very drunk. The pope asks him why he has been drinking so much. "Thou, *batooshka*, hast not yet become accustomed to our ways," says this official. "After thou wilt have spent a year with us, it may be thou wilt drink more than I."

And it would indeed not be astonishing if that should come to pass, with conditions of life such as this new shepherd has to face. His salary is extremely small, not exceeding fifty or sixty roubles the year, and paid him under difficulties and in small driblets. To make both ends meet at all, the new pope must be on the constant lookout for christenings, funerals, weddings,

etc. He must drive in his little *kibitka*, pulled by an ancient pony, around the neighbouring villages of smaller size, keeping his eyes always open for events that may bring him an honest penny. In this way he picks up a couple of kopeks here, a meagre chicken or some eggs there, perhaps a bagful of flour, but often he has been driving about the whole day and returns in the evening to his family with perhaps the value of ten or twelve kopeks. These are conditions he has to face every day, for his congregation is poor and scattered. Something, though, is always offered him: vodka. Every place he goes it is the one phrase: "Here, *batooshka*, drink!"

The communal authorities have provided him, as we have seen, with quarters; *ergo*, the new shepherd must show his gratitude. He must provide a number of gallons of liquor, and treat his congregation with it, on pain of forfeiting for ever their goodwill.

Their argument runs this wise: "Thou, *batooshka*, hast to deal only with us. Thou must show us respect, and then we shall grant thee everything, and even bow low and respect thee. If thou wilt not do that, thou mightst as well pack up and leave us again. Be not sparing of thy back; it will not be thy loss if thou humblest thyself before the commune."

And in his dirty and slovenly room, shared with him by all the members of his family, he is expected to teach the children religious observances. The window panes are thickly covered with grime, and during the

long winter, while he is holding school, neither light nor fresh air ever penetrates. Only once a year, at Eastertide, the rotten flooring is swept and rinsed with water. Many a young clergyman of the Orthodox Church, complains our pope, lives in a veritable cave or else in the village *traktir* (inn). It is, therefore, easily understood that drunkenness is a widespread vice among the Orthodox clergy. This fact is recognised by the government. By the terms of an administrative law issued by the present Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobyedonostseff, the "service lists" of each pope contain as one of the paragraphs requiring official answers the remark "in what measure does he indulge in intoxicating drink?" Such a paragraph, sighs our pope, does not occur with other members of the government. It will be noticed that our pope reckons himself among the government officials, purely and simply. And he is quite right in doing this.

It is not necessary to accept these pictures as typical for the whole Orthodox clergy. They undoubtedly show only certain phases of it. But making every allowance, the conditions under which the great majority of this clergy live are far from satisfactory. Let us, for instance, examine the budget of the Holy Synod—the body which superintends all questions of salary, etc.—for a number of years back. The one for 1901 shows an appropriation of ten and one-half million roubles for "town and rural clergy, missions, and missionaries." If this sum were devoted entirely to the lower clergy

of Russia proper, it would mean an average salary of one hundred roubles per year for each. But this is not the case. Quite a large proportion of these ten and one-half millions goes to missionary purposes, to Orthodox clergymen abroad, where Russian churches are being constantly erected without special need for them. More of it is used for the many Russian churches and Orthodox institutions in non-Russian Russia. Everywhere, from Kamchatka to the Vistula, such Russian churches and popes are maintained, often in places where, religiously considered, there is no need of them.

The central government indeed makes liberal use of the pope and of the Orthodox Church for political purposes. The poor pope, abused, half-starved, and little considered at home, is sent as one of the most effective political agents to every portion of the empire where Russia deems the strengthening of political ties advisable. And the comparison between the Russian village pope in the heart of Russia, say in the provinces of Saratoff, or Tamboff, with his brethren in Poland, Lithuania, and throughout the Baltic borderlands is often truly surprising. In the latter, where he is to subserve the prestige of the central government and to act as a Russianising agent, he has a fine large dwelling-house, often carriage and horses, fine farm and grazing lands, gardens and orchards, and pretty, well-ordered church edifices. There he lives comfortably on his regularly paid salary of one thousand to fifteen hundred roubles and the proceeds of his fertile land. He

has a good school under him, does not need to bend his back to the commune, nor to starve or befuddle himself with vodka. Religious brotherhoods are founded by him and by Russian patriots in the interior provinces, and collections are made in the whole of Orthodox Russia, in order to make Lithuanians and Letts good Russians and members of the Orthodox Church.

Scarcely had Russia obtained a footing in Manchuria when the Holy Synod established a Manchurian bishopric, with its seat in Peking, and a large Orthodox convent was founded in Manchuria, in order to promote there the Russian Orthodox mission. For everything lying far off the Holy Synod has always an open hand, "excepting for us, the poor popes in Russia," is the naïve plaint of our village pope. And the examples he cites are indeed more or less convincing.

He makes the statement that the regular salary received by a pope being in charge of a large parish amounts to 144 roubles per year in the interior of Russia, 108 roubles in one of medium size, and seventy-two in a small one. With that these poor popes are even made to pay back a portion of their meagre earnings to the consistories for fees. In all his dealings with these church authorities he must put his hand in his pocket.

There is perceptible slow improvement in all this; the Russian considers it good form not to be chary of his gifts for Church and clergy. But at present the conditions of the rank and file, of by far the greater

bulk of the lower clergy, are still nothing less than deplorable. The ordinary pope, of plebeian descent, of scant education, suffers intensely under the contempt entertained for him by the nation as a whole; even the brutalised peasant in his heart deems himself superior to the pope. And then the strong pressure exerted on him by the Holy Synod, and its subservient instruments; the soldierlike discipline enforced against the lower clergy; and the miserable material position held by him — all these disadvantages make life for the average pope very hard indeed.

In this connection a recently published collection of tales dealing with the everyday life of the Russian pope —it is the Chronicles of Leskoff which is meant—affords considerable insight. These tales show plainly that an ennobling influence by the pope upon the grossly material life of the peasantry is simply an impossibility; they show the position of the Orthodox clergy in a humiliating light. Even if a pope is possessed of the purest motives, of zeal for moral improvement, he is hampered at every step by the rigid Church discipline to which he is made to submit. A strict adherence to the forms of worship is demanded of him, and every individual striving is frowned upon by his superiors; he is not allowed to apply in practice the word of Scripture. In his preachings and in his intercourse with his congregation he must stick closely to all the rules laid down by the Holy Synod. Contravention in this respect is punished far harder than omission of any of his

higher duties. It is the state, the government, which holds him strictly to account; he is treated as a mere tool of autocracy.

Of late years the Orthodox clergy in Russia are expected to devote their best efforts not to the cure of souls but to the hunting down and conversion of the sectarians. If a pope shows skill and persistence in this respect he is sure of promotion. Such men indeed are soon sent to better parishes, by preference to those in the border provinces, where their peculiar talents in espionage and conversion can best be utilised.

Every young *diakon* of the Russian Church knows this lesson by heart. He can tell in a moment to which national saint the peasant must turn for aid and intercession in every particular case, from the dearth of his crops to sickness in the family or a childless wife. But to compose a sermon from the Gospel and to endeavour to make this same peasant a rational and moral being,—these are things which mean a thorny pathway for him. He is almost certain to come into conflict with the Holy Synod. If he goes on offending, he will be sent to a very poor parish far to the north by the shores of the White Sea, soon to fall a victim to the rigours of climate; or else, if he is unmarried or a widower, he is buried alive in one of the many monasteries, all of which are under the rule of the so-called White Clergy, his bitterest enemies.

The natural consequence of all this is that the attitude which the Russian peasant occupies towards the

Church, that the peasant's entire religious life, have nothing to do with the heart or with morals. It is only customs, formulas, gestures, genuflexions, external sacrifices, fasting, public confession, and fees. And another consequence is that the Russian, as soon as he is touched by the true spirit of the Gospel, turns away from the State Church and becomes a sectarian. That explains the enormous spread of sectarianism. But the Church instantly interferes. And if to this is added the political propaganda, then money is found at once in plenty for popes, missions, newly erected churches, and schools. For the sake of national prestige, the Russian will hunger physically, as was shown before; for its sake he will also hunger spiritually.

It is very difficult to obtain a clear view of the moral life of the Russian people. No statistics, such as every Western country has, are available. Now and then some data, more or less reliable and general, appear in government reports, giving isolated facts about drunkenness and certain other forms of vice or crime. But they are neither to be depended on, nor do they afford a general idea of the entire subject. However, where statistics fail, the realistic writings of popular authors portray in a measure the inner life of the nation. And the more recent Russian literature is a wonderfully correct mirror of this life. Tolstoi's *Powers of Darkness*, for instance, is a veritable fund of knowledge in this line, showing beyond question not only the dense ignorance of the peasants in Great Russia, but also

their fearful moral degeneracy. Other writings, such as those of Terpigoreff, Gorki, Chekhoff, and Andreyeff, contribute much knowledge of this description, and we cannot go very far wrong when we accept the pictures of the national moral status presented by these authors, since they are accepted as true by the Russian journals and public.

We see, then, that family life has greatly suffered not only in the upper classes of Russian society, but in even a higher degree in the broad strata of the lower classes. In Russia woman never occupied such a position as she has all along with the Germanic races. This is a Slavic trait, but in Russia it has become particularly pronounced owing to the Mongolian suzerainty which lasted for centuries. Woman, in fact, occupied in the past and occupies in the present a place hardly better than in Oriental countries. Popularly she is looked upon throughout Russia as the semi-slave of man. She must serve him, offer the cup to his lips, wheedle and cajole him, and be thankful alike for a blow or caress. The peasant who does not beat his wife is supposed to have no affection for her. All this is true, even in this year 1904, not alone with the dregs of the population, but with the entire peasant class and with the numerically small town population making up the middle class. The Muscovite merchant still believes in the stick as a means of chastising the wife of his bosom. That the higher classes in Russia, brought under the influence of Western notions since the days

of Peter the Great, have got over this national estimate of woman, plays practically no figure in a country where they form at most one-half per cent. of the total population.

Studying at first hand, so far as circumstances permit, the relations of the sexes among the Russian peasantry, several facts become at once noticeable. Wives and daughters are accustomed to be viewed, primarily, as slaves, toilers, and as such they endure brutal treatment, disregard of their feelings, without complaint. Wifehood and motherhood are considered small things by the men, and connubial duty is held to consist much more in serving, even every whim of the husband, than in fidelity to the marriage vow. Morals, in fact, have come down to a very low level since the days of emancipation, and breaches of marital faith are not, as a rule, regarded in a serious light. This state of demoralisation is very largely due to the new conditions of peasant life that have grown up under freedom. The men and the larger boys wander off in the summer to look for work elsewhere, leaving their wives and daughters to till the little field. The wives meanwhile take into the house as nominal boarders soldiers off on leave of absence, tramps, or any other male flotsam that happens to come their way. The frightful increase in the number of illegitimate children in the rural districts is, therefore, not to be wondered at. Russian statistics say that in several provinces, such as Tver and Kostroma, illegitimate births form now fifty per cent. of the total.

Another source of immorality is found in the fact that during harvest time, when good wages can be had, many thousands of such wives and daughters, bereft for months of the control and protection of husbands and fathers, go off in crowds of hundreds to large estates in the vicinity of their home village, working there for from three to six weeks. The accommodations provided for them, such as loosely constructed barracks, haylofts, barns, or stables, in the very nature of things, further promiscuous intercourse, and the entire absence of restraint does the rest. Estate owners do not even attempt to check this evil. In fact, they rather encourage it, for it tends to keep their workers, male and female, in good humour and to prevent them from going off to another estate.

"What do I care about this?" said the wealthy owner of one of these estates, on being interrogated about these conditions. "By September they have all fled, and husbands are never the wiser on their return home. Indeed, the husbands are not a bit better, no matter where they happen to be. And as for me, I save a lot of trouble and annoyance by not interfering. The main thing is, my crop is put away in safety."

There are questions connected with the conditions here merely hinted at, questions of so delicate a nature as to forbid their discussion in this book, yet which are of utmost importance to the hygiene and morals of the whole nation. The very general spread of certain diseases among the Russian peasantry of to-day is among

these. They and the large consumption of potato brandy, containing a lot of fusel oil, have greatly diminished the health and sturdy vitality of these classes. From the point of view of Russian national economy, these evils are of the first magnitude.

Still worse from a certain aspect is the loosening of parental ties. Maternity has become a growing burden under new conditions of life. Of course, the fearful ignorance of peasant fathers and mothers, the unsanitary state of their dwellings, and the insufficient nourishment during a great part of the year, together have much to do with the enormous child mortality in rural Russia. But it may be doubted whether all the above factors together play so important a rôle in the ever-increasing death-rate among the babies, as does the diminishing of maternal affection and duty. The newborn is treated from the first day on as a curse, not as a blessing, and the mother scarcely devotes enough attention to her offspring to keep it alive. The infant is placed in a box, leaving the face open, and this is suspended by a hook from the ceiling. Mother or brother, perhaps an elder sister, is seated near this box, attending to some household task or domestic labour, and with the foot the box is kept swinging, and if the little thing persists in wailing or restlessness, it is given a dose of a decoction to be found in every Russian *izba*. This is nothing else than crude opium, obtained from the exuding juice of the poppy. The infant is reared in pestilential air and fed on the most unwholesome

nourishment. If nature has not given it an iron constitution, it will surely die under such conditions. Considerably over one-half of all the peasant children born in Central Russia die at an early age, and that accounts for the stationary population there. An unusually repulsive feature in all this, however, is the lack of mother love. Occasionally, it is true, a burst of tenderness overcomes her; then the mother will shower caresses and sweet words of endearment on her child, but the next instant this mood is gone, and she will maltreat it most cruelly, curse it, and say: "If God and the saints would only take it away! We have no use for it; it cannot even work, and is good for nothing. Poor people cannot afford to have children."

And thus the child dies, and it is hurriedly put away in the ground, and the pope makes a cross over it, and the mother returns to her hovel, well satisfied. The relaxation of the maternal instinct in the Russian peasant classes is indeed a baneful sign in the downward scale of morality. It is a sign of more portent even than that of the loosening of the marital ties, for it saps at the very root of national life.

A good share of the blame for the growth of such conditions must be placed on the shoulders of the Orthodox clergy. Perhaps no other people in Europe require as much as do the Russians to be kept in the straight and narrow path by constant precept and example. Yet we have seen that this duty is shirked by the Orthodox Church, and that its exercise even is

strongly discouraged by the Holy Synod and by the whole government. Where formalism rules and takes the place of living Christianity, the fruits cannot be otherwise than they are. This fact is instinctively recognised by nearly all Russians belonging to the Orthodox Church. It is due to this dim conception of a deep truth that the word "sectarian" in Russia is synonymous with a man of a higher type. And, as a matter of fact, the Russian sectarian of whatever kind is morally purer and shows a stronger character than the adherent of the State Church. He does not drink nor smoke, and he is more economical, more diligent, and more orderly.

How comes that? It cannot be the difference in dogma alone, for the great mass of those Russians outside the State Church is made up of believers in the Old Faith, such as the Orthodox Church of to-day was before the reform in the seventeenth century. These men of the Old Faith are in their tenets not perceptibly differentiated from the others, and they even cling to form and ritual observances more rigidly than do the members of the Orthodox Church. It is true that these adherents of the Old Faith are not habitually classed with the sectarians, but they show to quite a degree the same characteristics that distinguish the latter. It is clear, therefore, that the distinction lies not so much in *what* is believed as in *how* it is believed. In the one case the same dogmas are observed by compulsion, and produce no moral benefit; in the other

they are believed in as a matter of free choice, as a spiritual privilege, and by the sacrifices brought for such a creed it becomes a living reality and a moral force. Besides, the people of the Old Faith, being persecuted, draw much closer one to the other. They help and protect each other, and therewith the moral element becomes more pronounced, exerting a purifying influence not only in church and congregation, but also in the family. In any case the fact is not to be denied that the Old Faith Russian stands morally on a higher plane than the Orthodox, and in this way he has also attained to a greater measure of material well-being.

But the Russian sects, properly so-called, have something additional to elevate them. There is a greater infusion of real religion in their various creeds, and thus the transmutation of their moral character has been greater. For example, during the reign of Alexander I., Prince Galitzyn, his premier, called into Russia the British Bible Society, and furthered its objects. The Bible was translated into Russian, whereas up to that time it had only existed in the Old Slavonic tongue, the one still used in the Orthodox Church and almost quite unintelligible to the low-class Russian. For many years after that, though, this new Russian Bible did not produce much effect, and this for the simple reason that the great mass of the people had not yet been taught to read. After the emancipation, in 1861, with the establishment of many schools, a knowledge of the Scriptures extended rapidly. The low-class

Russian in many cases used the Bible instead of a primer when learning to read. The Bible to-day has become a great living force among a relatively large percentage of the ignorant classes. Its influence has been and is far more powerful among the peasantry than the Nihilists and other political reformers and agitators ever were or could be. If the Holy Synod wants to perpetuate for ever the spiritual bondage of the Russian peasantry, the Bible must be tabooed and a stop put to the further spread of its teachings.

The genesis of that large sect in Russia known as the Stundists (the word being derived from the German *Stunde*, *i. e.*, hour of prayer), is well known. They grew out of the living example given their Russian neighbours by the German Mennonites, strict Protestants and very careful in their walk of life. The Mennonites existed in large colonies in Russia, both in the South and South-west and in the steppes beyond the Volga. They never tried to make proselytes among the Russians proper; it was merely the living force of example by which they taught. To-day it is estimated that the number of Stundists in Russia is between seven and eight millions.

The religious sense of the Russian, brooding for centuries on empty formula and feeling an aching void, quickly seized upon the liberating power of a simple and practical creed, and the Stundist movement flew through the whole South of the country. It is touching to see these simple peasants trying to escape from

their spiritual wilderness. Wherever the Bible in a Russian translation has found its way into a village, soon a circle of peasants is formed, some of them able to read and therefore to follow the reader, others ignorant of the art of reading but intense listeners; and all dating a moral regeneration from the hour they first made acquaintance with that wonderful book from a knowledge of which they had been shut out by their own priests and Church.

Next to the Stundists other sects have arisen, all of them growing out of Protestant soil, and more or less influenced in their creed by it. Such, for instance, are the Molokhans and Dukhoborzis. The latter, it is known, have for years encountered the most violent persecution on the part of the government. Many, many thousands of Dukhoborzis, sometimes whole villagefuls of them, were sent to the most inclement parts of Siberia. Count Leo Tolstoi, as is well known, has taken especial interest in this sect, possibly for the reason that in some of their teachings and practices they have been guided by his own tuition.

One Russian sect specially deserving of mention is that founded by the late M. Pashkoff, a colonel in the Imperial Guards and a man of great wealth and very distinguished family. This sect, curiously enough, took its rise in St. Petersburg during the eighties, and found its first numerous adherents among the nobility and in court circles. Pashkoff had imbibed during a visit to England some of the Methodist spirit, and for

the first time becoming acquainted with the Gospels and with practical Christianity, on his return he dismissed all thought of earthly advantage and turned his thoughts, his whole life, and his vast fortune in the direction of converting his countrymen to the new truths he had espoused.

Intellectually Pashkoff was not above mediocrity; but his heart and his imagination had been powerfully stirred by his conversion, and with the enthusiasm that glowed in his own soul he enkindled the slumbering fires of religious sentiment in all those with whom he came in contact. In his palace on the Nevski Prospect in St. Petersburg he assembled daily hundreds of persons from among his large circle of acquaintances, many of them from among the immediate entourage of the Czar. But this not alone. He called in from the streets into his parlours crowds of men and women of the lower classes—drivers and porters, peddlers and street vendors, washerwomen and hucksters, and to all of them he carried the glad message which he himself had received. Soon there was not a street sweeper in the whole of St. Petersburg who did not know Pashkoff, and he carried on his evangelistic labours, always unscathed, in the very slums of the huge city. Thousands blessed him, to whom he had been an apostle and a benefactor, and with his millions and the great funds he collected from among his adherents belonging to the wealthy and privileged classes, he founded charitable institutions of every description. Of course, there came

a day when the Holy Synod scented danger in all this. Pashkoff was banished, his institutions were destroyed, a large part of his estates confiscated, and the man himself died two years ago, in Paris, in obscurity.

As with Pashkoff, so it was with many thousands in Russia when they first were permitted to read the Bible. From village to village flew the spark of religious sentiment, and it set afire many hearts that had been sighing under the iron heel of the Holy Synod.

And this is not astonishing; the people themselves saw that the sectarians of every description were superior to them in works as well as words. Living Christianity had not been brought into the country by St. Vladimir and his Byzantine priests, and the Russian, therefore, taking the nation as a whole, has never become acquainted with the essence and spirit of Christianity. Where these to-day penetrate the land, together with the Bible, the effect must be deep and almost instantaneous. The effect, indeed, is one which even the strongest government could never attain by purely worldly means. But the effect runs counter to the State Church, and leads to a renunciation of Orthodox tenets. For that reason the government has engaged in systematic warfare against sectarianism.

The severity with which this warfare has been waged for twenty years and more past is beyond words. Compulsory transmigration of Molokhans and Dukhoborzis to the arid wastes beyond the Caspian Sea, leaving them to starvation and with scarcely any means, has

been about the mildest form of persecution. Had it not been for English charity, for collections gathered under the auspices of Tolstoi and other humanitarians, many more thousands would have succumbed to privations. By the thousands they were sent, under the escort of savage Cossacks, prodding them with their pikes and lances when they fell down by the roadside from sheer exhaustion, toiling their weary way on foot for thousands of miles, to their final destination in the most inhospitable regions of the empire. Other thousands were sent into the murderous mines at Tobolsk and its vicinity, and perished in that way, while still others were impressed into the army. All this for the greater glory and security of a so-called Christian Church, under the behests of a body which takes to itself the name of Holy Synod.

Despite all this, sectarianism is spreading and honeycombing the whole of Russia. It is believed that the total number of such sectarians cannot fall short of twenty-five to thirty millions; the last official census gives the number of adherents of the Orthodox Church in European Russia at 86⅓ millions out of a total of 110. The men and women belonging to the Old Faith are, however, in these lists classed with the regular Orthodox Church.

Of all the factors making for evil in Russia this one of shackling the masses in spiritual bondage, hindering by cruel means every attempt to reach the living waters of faith, is perhaps the most far-reaching as it is un-

questionably the most fiendish. Next to the abolishment of the suicidal communal system in the country, and to the establishment of provincial autonomy, must stand the spiritual emancipation of the masses in the programme of all patriotic Russians who wish their country to grow sane and sound once more.

The Russia of to-day reminds one of a vast morass. From its swampy soil rise unwholesome vapours. There is a mollusc-like flabbiness in the Russian masses, which prevents them from interposing a manly resistance to vice and crime. With nothing to stop them, almost without a will of their own, thousands of Russians are reeling towards evil. It is not passion that drives them to become the victims of fate. It is not fear of punishment that keeps them back. They are not wicked by nature, but they allow themselves to drift. They are without moral education and without the barriers of character. They follow limply their own uncontrolled desires, just as children would. And with all that, though children, they are gifted and capable of noble deeds. While they bow to the ground before the noble and powerful, yet they will rise from the ground and face their superiors as equals.

There is indeed a strange mixture of good and evil, of fine and despicable qualities in the Russian peasant: he allows himself to be tortured to death, without a murmur; he endures everything; physically, intellectually, and morally he shows admirable powers of endurance, and yet one is often astonished at the

unconscious dignity of these poor semi-savages, and one will find in them occasionally an amazing moral grandeur. But it seems almost as if the sinews of the peasant's active forces had been severed: the individual character is lacking, the will-power, the personality of homogeneous make. The dictum of his commune, the order of his authorities, and the will of the Czar: outside of these three forces there is not living in his breast a clear consciousness of self-will. Is he still capable of development? Or is he the son of a nation without a future?

## CHAPTER IX

### SLOW GROWTH OF A MIDDLE CLASS

The Muscovite Rulers of the Late Middle Ages Destroyed the Civic Spirit and Broke the Freedom and Privileges of the Ancient Towns—Why the Free Cossack Settlements Never Became Organised Commonwealths—The Growth of a New Middle Class Dates Back but Ten Years—Urban Population Concentrating in the Few Large Cities—Small Municipal Budgets, Rendering Modern Improvements Impossible—Decline of the Old Provincial Centres and Reasons Therefor—Russia's Deficient System of Public Education—The Part Played Respectively by the Government, Provincial Administrations, and Communes—The Question of Church Schools—Russian Teachers as a Body: Their Salaries, Professional Training, and Attainments—Religious Intolerance Taught Systematically at School—A Few Statistics Showing the Poor Results of the Present System—The Russian Student and his Present Frame of Mind—A New and Important Element: Sons of the Orthodox Clergy—A Few Notes on Russian Literature

IN the Muscovy of old there never was citizenship in the Anglo-Saxon sense; there were no cities or towns with independent government or communal autonomy, with a population attending to commerce and trade, yet of warlike qualities, such as existed everywhere during the Middle Ages and after in countries to the West. Russians are fond of attributing to their

Mongolian conquerors, who ruled them for centuries with a rod of iron, all the historic ills from which they suffer. The truth is that, as for so many other evil things in the Russia of to-day, the Slavic princes of Muscovy, their heirs and successors, were responsible for the non-development of civic life and municipal liberty. Before their time, when seventy-two princes and a few flourishing municipal republics divided the territory of Russia among themselves, there did exist towns and cities which were governed very much as those in the Italy and Germany of those days. These centres of population at that time grew and prospered in every sense, and lively commercial and intellectual relations were entertained between them and western countries. It is well known that two of these ancient towns, namely, Nishni-Novgorod and Pskov, were for several centuries fully as free as were Florence or Genoa, Lubeck or Bremen, and that, as a matter of fact, they belonged for a long time to the Hanseatic League.

When Muscovy rose to supreme power, its rulers—autocrats and tyrants—broke all this down. They destroyed the civic republics with their citizenship framed according to Western notions. Equality, but the equality of slavery, was instituted and enforced. Thus within a short time the slow growth towards wealth and light of civilisation was utterly uprooted. What had taken five hundred years to develop organically, was now razed to the ground by the ruthless hand of Muscovy. Thus, the fruits and germs of cul-

ture were killed in the whole country, and in place of them rose slowly the foundations of that gigantic structure, imposing in size and outward power, yet resting on rotten pillars, which we see to-day.

Aside from that, however, there were other causes rendering difficult the growth of a middle class. Arable land there was in plenty, and the peasant, so long as he was free, was not compelled, as he had been in Western countries, to seek profitable labour and protection from robber knights in walled towns. Then came Ivan the Terrible and those who followed in his wake in Old Muscovy, and the peasant was made a serf, tied to his natal clod. And that, of course, made thereafter impossible the growth of municipal life. Wherever and whenever the peasant felt too hard the despotic pressure of the lord of the soil which he tilled, he fled to the steppe, down South to the Free Cossacks on the Don and the Dniepr, and joined there a savage life devoid of care. Or else he founded agricultural colonies in the unsettled parts of the country, on the Kirghiz steppe along the Volga or beyond it. For generations he was left there undisturbed, achieving a modest measure of prosperity.

These are the main reasons for the almost total lack of a Russian middle class during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and up to about forty years ago. The numerically very small middle class we do find in the Russia of those days was almost entirely foreign, ever since the days of Peter the Great. They were

from the border provinces of Russia, especially Baltic Germans, with an intermingling of Dutch, English, Swiss, Armenians, Tartars, and some Poles.

All beginnings of civic life in Old Russia were due to foreign elements, chiefly Germanic in the North and West, and Turkish and Tartar in the East. But they were not destined to grow under Muscovy's despotic yoke. The one-man power in Moscow suppressed them.

With a people of another stripe the Cossack settlements in the South and South-west, later on also in the South-east, might have been instrumental in developing a Russian middle class. Outwardly at least circumstances were very favourable to such a development. And for many generations the spirit of liberty dwelt strong in the bosom of the Free Cossacks. But, after all, the Cossack himself was a Russian, and with his national bent could never become a peaceful and hard-working dweller in prosperous towns, requiring innate sense of order and system. And we have seen that the Cossack settlements after a while were incorporated, more or less completely, in the body politic of Russia proper. Therefore it was that the Cossack *ssetche* (fortified camps in which the unmarried Cossacks dwelt) never grew beyond this crude stage. Although their *hetman* (ruler) was freely chosen by all adult Cossacks, he never attempted to lead his men in peace as he did in war. The Cossack republics were not much better than the so-called Republic of Poland.

It is only during the last ten years that the Russian urban population has been rapidly increasing. This was due to Witte's industrial policy. The industrial labour element in the towns is now said to exceed two millions. The number of technically schooled workmen and mechanics is growing, and commerce employs a steadily rising number, while also the members of the learned professions are becoming more numerous and of more importance. A wholesome vivifying of the small middle class has been taking place, a fact made palpable by the strong pressure to enter technical and commercial schools, as well as the universities, seminaries, and other preparatory institutions.

Unfortunately, the increase in the urban population is by no means uniform. Everybody is crowding into the few centres of industry and commerce. Chief among these are Moscow and Vladimir; outside of these two cities and their surrounding districts nearly the only cities that show a rapid growth are located on the borders of the empire to the west. The cause of this is that interior trade has greatly declined in favour of export trade since the completion of the railroads. With the exception of the Moscow district the young Russian industry is concentrating in the outlying provinces, partly because of the ease with which capital is found there, but also because of the greater facilities of obtaining there from the neighbouring countries technically schooled foremen and labourers, half-finished industrial products, and rawstuffs and machinery,

while the cheaper coal and the saving in freight likewise play a part in the process.

In this way it has come about that commerce and industry are centred in the frontier districts: In St. Petersburg, Reval, Riga, Libau, Warsaw, Lodz, Odessa, Kieff, Rostoff, Baku, etc., as well as in Moscow and Vladimir, of course. St. Petersburg and Moscow have each a population of about 1,200,000 to-day, Warsaw of 700,000, Riga of about 250,000, and Odessa and Lodz about 200,000 each. Altogether there are in the Russia of to-day some seventy-four towns and cities of over 30,000 population, and sixteen of them of over 100,000. That, it will be admitted, is very little for an empire holding 130,000,000 people. Of the sixteen large towns but two are situated in the interior of Russia. A Russian statistician, Trubnikoff, mentions in his writings altogether 709 towns in Russia proper (excluding Poland, the Caucasus, and Turkestan), and their combined revenues and budgets at a total of sixty-seven million roubles annually. This would mean an average annual revenue of only 94,500 roubles. But deducting the budgets of the few large towns what is left for the smaller ones is very little. For instance, St. Petersburg to-day has a budget of seventeen million roubles. Moscow has one of twelve millions, and if we count in Warsaw, Odessa, and Riga more than one-half of this entire sixty-seven millions is swallowed up by just a few of the 709 towns. Anyway, sixty-seven million roubles is less by fifty per cent. than the

budget of Berlin alone, while Paris, London, and New York show budgets overtopping the entire municipal budgets of Russia by from one hundred to two hundred per cent. The total urban population of Russia to-day is counted at 16,289,000, or about thirteen per cent. of the total population.

But there is more to be said on this score. The cities and towns in the interior are stationary or decreasing in population. Such old and formerly important centres as Tver, Pskov, Nishni-Novgorod, Tula, and many others have declined within the past ten years by from twenty to forty per cent. One of the most important Russian newspapers, the *Novoe Vremya*, a short time ago furnished quite complete and interesting data on this subject. It mentioned that the ancient town of Ouglitch, once capital of an independent realm, has come down to a beggarly nine thousand of population.

The same Russian newspaper in this connection indulges in saddening reflections. It describes the intellectual level of the provincial and district capitals as being extremely low. School facilities are stated to be deplorably deficient. In the matter of postal communication they are, if anything, in a worse plight. Then it goes on:

> No libraries, no theatres, no reading-halls! And if on the initiative of a teacher or other intellectual leader a lecture is given, with or without magic lantern, it takes place in the roomiest building of the town, namely, the jail. Such a lecture is considered a great social event, and the local paper devotes columns to it. In many of these towns there is not even a

club, and if so it is more a place for the members to indulge without restraint in their drinking propensities than anything else. A social life in our sense does not exist. . . . Decay is noticeable at every step: The streets are rank with grass, the fences tumbling to pieces, and the small houses and hovels of the dealers and shop-keepers are half in ruins, with broken panes, while everywhere a total lack of enterprise and of financial means is noticeable. Commerce and municipal revenues are in a hopeless condition.

As one of the chief causes of these melancholy conditions the *Novoe Vremya* mentions the railroads. These have passed by by far the larger number of the old towns, sometimes at a distance of a hundred miles and more. True, the railroads have also created new settlements along their tracks, but these are as yet in process of formation and of small importance.

And then the discouraging municipal policy of the government. The towns are overloaded with industrial taxes, real estate taxes, charges for the quartering of the troops, and other heavy dues. At the same time one source of revenue after another is deflected for the benefit of the state. Expenditures for police, the military, and for barracks are constantly growing. So that even the large and fairly prosperous cities are in an unhealthy financial condition despite their growth, and are able to satisfy their pressing wants only by enlarging the load of their debts. The smaller towns have not even credit in the money market, and are, therefore, powerless to make improvements. Then, to be sure, the decay of agriculture weighs heavily on the provincial towns.

The great majority of these provincial towns, therefore, are dead. They do not produce anything, they have no industry, and even commerce has largely passed out of their hands, and gone to the few large cities. They are purely passive bodies, the meeting-places of the nobility, themselves impoverished, and the enforced abode of a hive of underpaid officials, with a number of small shops where merely the most elementary needs of the population can be satisfied.

The great artery of the Volga is navigated by some six hundred steamers and thousands of barges, but how poor and miserable are the few cities along the shores of this mighty river! Kasan, Simbirsk, Saratoff—towns without life, desolate streets, inns and hostelries without guests, museums without objects inside, clubs without social life—that is the picture which meets the eye of the traveller.

It is different, of course, in the few large cities. Here is concentrated the material and intellectual life of the nation: in industry and commerce, in universities and preparatory schools, in literature, art, and press. All this brings about a vitalising effect. And in them alone one feels something like publicity, public life, and progress.

The Russian definition of "intelligence" varies according to the definer. All the adherents of the old system, and their name is million, look askance at modern education. In their minds they associate it with that importunate Occident which to them has

been a thorn in the flesh. The very name of student has lost credit with the masses and with the government since the futile undertakings of a more or less revolutionary description of the Nihilists. However, the intelligent class in Russia is nevertheless slowly but constantly increasing. A feeling is beginning to pervade the educated classes that, after all, it is the student of university, commercial high school, and technical college upon whom rests the future development of the country. This feeling has become more pronounced since the recent increase in the autocratic and bureaucratic spirit.

The reform of Russia's educational system is one of the most important in her programme.

During 1902 the government devoted to public education of every grade a matter of 74.8 million roubles. Of this about one-half is used up for military and technical colleges and for the universities. To the share of the middle schools fell only 10½ millions, and about nine millions to that of the lower schools. It is estimated that the government spends forty kopeks per head of population for public education. This is the figure given by Prof. Skarshinski in the *European Messenger*, while Witte himself figures out fifty-nine kopeks per head.

Trubnikoff states the number of schools of every kind in Russia at 78,699, whereas the Moscow *Vyedomosti* places the number at 79,934. The quality of these schools, taking them as a whole, has been declin-

ing. The Russian teacher is looked upon principally as an agent of his government. Scientifically his preparation is superficial, and pedagogically he is entirely unprepared. There are exceptions, of course, but the above is the rule. Correct political principles are looked upon by the appointing power, the government, as the chief requisite in a teacher of the young. But we see another curious feature. The cream of the Russian teachers and professors are not kept at home, in Russia proper; they are sent, so to speak, to enforce the national propaganda in the border provinces. There they are, above all, teachers of the Russian language, of Russian thought and governmental methods, and everything else in the way of duty comes in the second place. This fact is very noticeable indeed in the Polish provinces, in the Caucasus, and along the Baltic.

Of the total number of government schools, 12,132 are under the administration of the War Department, and these schools fill a real national need in imparting elementary instruction to the recruits of the army. The worst part of Russia's public educational system is that of the schools of middle rank. Kovalevski counts of them 191 gymnasia, 53 progymnasia, and 115 commercial schools. These schools together receive from the government a matter of 10½ million roubles, equivalent to 8⅓ kopeks per head. For all the public schools (with the exception of the universities and technical colleges) the central government expends

every year about fifteen kopeks per head, or one per cent. of its total revenues. Comment is superfluous.

One feature, however, must not be overlooked. The *zemstva* (provincial chambers) since 1861 have founded schools with provincial funds, and in very many cases induced the more populous and well-to-do villages to do the same. The last available statistics in this respect show us that of the entire cost of maintaining the lower public schools (which means almost altogether schools where reading and writing only are taught) some sixty-nine per cent. are contributed by these provincial chambers, twenty-nine by the rural communes, and only two per cent. by the central government. Progress is quite noticeable. In those provinces possessing provincial chambers the expenditures for elementary schools have risen sixty-nine per cent. during the last seven years. Unfortunately, the government by the law of June 12, 1900, has limited the increase of the revenues of these chambers, so that a further swelling of expenditures for educational purposes is rendered impossible.

These elementary schools since 1891 have been turned over to the Orthodox Church, the village priests being charged with the duty of superintending them. Of the total number of 58,490 elementary schools, 51,540 have been thus placed under Church superintendence. The Church also conducts with means of its own some 21,500 elementary schools, having an average attendance of 1½ million children. Besides,

this same Orthodox Church has under its guidance and administration 18,341 schools devoted to the education of priests; this class of schools exists in two subdivisions, higher and lower, and comprises sixteen seminaries. The teachers employed in all the schools administered by the Church are made up of priests, *diakons*, chanters, but in their majority (about thirty-seven thousand) of laymen. Salaries paid are very low. For nineteen thousand teachers the annual income is less than one hundred roubles. The highest salaries, averaging five hundred roubles yearly, were paid to 122, all of them teachers or professors in the seminaries, etc. To this category of teachers applies again a former remark: the best of them and those receiving the highest salaries are sent to the non-Russian border provinces, largely for purposes of the national propaganda. Altogether the Orthodox Church in Russia spends a round eleven millions annually, whereof five million roubles come out of the national treasury.

The spirit pervading these schools under the domination of the Orthodox Church, that is, the Holy Synod, is best illustrated by an authentic remark of its Chief Procurator, Pobyedonostseff, to the effect that "education and schooling are more harmful than beneficial for the Russian peasantry."

One of the main topics taught in the higher-grade Church schools is that of Russian sectarianism, particularly Stundism. Pupils and teachers are armed out

of an arsenal of arguments for the combating of sectarian tenets. Religious instruction in all the elementary schools is largely of a polemical character. This is particularly the case in the eparchies of Poltava, Kharkoff, Voronesh, Astrakhan, and Tamboff, comprising those portions of the empire where sectarianism is most widespread. In the case of children barely able to read and write, such teaching must result in wholly erroneous ideas respecting the purview of religion. The children are also trained in the Old Slavonic church chant, and bands of choristers are formed out of them. The general verdict about the Church schools in Russia must be: cheap and inefficient.

A knowledge of reading is, however, spreading. All sorts of persons turn temporary or permanent schoolmasters. Many a corporal or sergeant, having served his term in the army and returned to his native village, makes a precarious living by teaching the art of reading to his one-time playmates. Nevertheless, the census of 1897 (the main data of which are only now becoming available) shows still an amazing amount of ignorance in the whole of Russia. In St. Petersburg, out of 1,242,815 Russian subjects, 469,720 were analphabets, or 37.4 of the total population. Of the 290,000 recruits yearly joining the army, forty-three per cent. are ignorant of reading or writing. Among the older peasants scarcely five in a hundred can read a line. The female sex is hardly taught at all. The Russian periodical *Nedlya* (The Week) makes the statement that not more

than one peasant girl out of every seven has even a slight knowledge of reading. In many villages there is not a single woman or girl able to read or write.

Among the growing youth the ambition is widespread to acquire a fair measure of knowledge. This applies particularly to the middle class. Enthusiasm, persistence, and respect for knowledge are increasing. Russian students, male and female, are thronging the universities and technical high schools of Germany and Switzerland, and they exhibit admirable qualities of diligence, quick perception, and the ability to endure hardships.

The revolutionary element among them, both at home and abroad, is decreasing. The fact that even of late frequent riots have taken place at the universities of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kieff, and other cities must not be misinterpreted. These demonstrations were due mainly to the draconic administrative measures adopted some time ago for the stricter discipline of the students. Nihilism, as a separate political creed, plots for the assassination of obnoxious dignitaries, have in the main been abandoned. A gradual but thorough change has come over the minds of these youthful extremists, especially since the assassination of Alexander II. It is true that the successful attempt on the life of Sipiaguine, a minister particularly objectionable to the university students, was by many put to the score of the latter. But the evidence tended all in the other direction.

It cannot be denied that the actual conditions of Russia necessarily excite in particularly impressionable individuals a state of mind and feeling easily roused to revolutionary tactics. And such impressionable individuals in the nature of things will most readily and numerously be found among the youth at the transitional stage of life. The barbarously severe reactionism of Alexander III. could not fail to keep such sentiments alive. Nevertheless, as above pointed out, the Russian student class have become convinced of the former folly of their ways. They have learned patience. They have become aware of the fact that the Russian peasantry, for whose benefit in former years they sacrificed life and future, are not ripe for their ideas; nay, that these same peasants would slay them like wild beasts as the enemies of the Czar.

Meanwhile industrialism has arisen in Russia, and has drawn several millions of former peasants into the centres of population. Famine after famine has devastated the country, and the labouring masses in the towns have begun to learn that this enthusiastic student youth are fighting their own battle. A dim conception of this has also entered the mind of the peasant. Besides, the young revolutionaries have doubtless remarked that the government, in other words the bureaucracy, are all along playing into their hands. The faults of this bureaucracy are becoming greater year by year, in such a measure as even to outweigh the almost endless patience and passive obedience of

the Russian peasant. At the same time they remarked that the government is carrying on a campaign of oppression and religious and national persecution against all the non-Russian elements in the empire, from Helsingfors to Tiflis. Thus they conclude that it is wisdom to wait.

A new and interesting element in all this, that is, not only in the ranks of the students but in the ranks of bureaucracy, has arisen in Russia in the person of the "popes' sons." Up to not many years ago the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church formed a caste. Their sons were compelled to join themselves the clergy. This is no longer the case, and the male progeny of the pope may now enter worldly callings. He is crowding particularly into the learned professions, the provincial appointments, and above all into the government offices, gradually displacing everywhere the degenerate nobility. Abjectly poor, these sons of the Russian clergy by intense work and a persistence beyond all discouragement contrive to obtain the great majority of free scholarships in the Russian universities and colleges. These scholarships, however, do not yield them an income large enough for even their modest needs. Thus, the growing generation of Russian priests' sons swell the ranks of the dissatisfied everywhere. Thousands of them have entirely discarded the faith of their fathers, and are intensely revolutionary in spirit. As a rule they are able men and have acquired in the school of adversity the habit of

diligence and close application. But it cannot be denied that they form a most dangerous new element in the body politic of the empire.

As they slowly ascend the ladder of bureaucracy, they often change their views, or at least their tactics. From among the ranks of these "popes' sons" have graduated such remarkable men in the Russia of recent days as the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobyedonostseff, himself; Bogolepoff, the Minister of Education (murdered not long ago); Wishnegradsky, the able Finance Minister, and many others.

Among the ills to which the unwise system of public education in Russia gives rise, is the necessity of complementing the measure of instruction and knowledge obtainable at Russian institutions by a residence of one or more years abroad. By Russianising, that is, lowering the level, of her former best universities the government has cut into its own flesh. The higher administrative offices in Russia were formerly largely reserved for graduates of her one university on a par with Western ideas and requirements, namely, Dorpat. This university she has now reduced even below the level of her better seats of learning in Russia proper. The very name of Dorpat has been wiped out, and changed to Yurieff, and Russian students unable to follow the courses at Moscow or St. Petersburg now find it easy sailing at Yurieff. In this way Russia has deprived herself of her best administrative officials and physicians, for the medical department in Dorpat was

of acknowledged excellence, and its graduates supplied all through the nineteenth century the whole of Russia with her best practitioners. At present Russia is obliged—since she cannot do entirely without professional men of thorough training and attainments—to send every year a percentage of her abler graduates from Moscow and other universities to Berlin (where alone some three hundred Russian students are taking post-graduate courses), Zurich, Geneva, and other foreign places. It goes without saying that these young men, highly intelligent as they are, cannot fail to draw parallels between home and foreign conditions, and that they return in many cases bitter enemies of their own government.

It may astonish many when the claim is set up here that much of Russian science and art is not of Russian national origin. The fact is nevertheless true. There are relatively few Russian scientists who are of Russian blood, even when the name might lead the unwary to suppose so. The latest and most shining light of Russian science, the chemist, Mendeleyeff, is of Polish origin. The acknowledged greatest physician of Russia is a Jew. Her great scientist, Karamsin, is a Tartar of pure lineage; Aivasovski is an Armenian; Bruelow is a Prussian; Sasha Schneider is a Baltic German; Antokolsk is another Jew, and so it goes. In the main Russian science in every field is ploughing with foreign horses. German, French, English, and of late American authors and scientists are plundered

and the fruits of their minds amalgamated into translations or adaptations to nourish the thirst for knowledge of the Russian student. And when a Russian scientist does produce an original work, such, for instance, as Ilovaiski with his Russian history, it were better it had been left undone, for it violates grossly the spirit of history and of internal truth.

It is quite different with Russian literature. That, on the whole, must be classed very highly. True, in drama the Russian genius is deficient. To compose a play meeting stage requirements and holding the attention of the audience from first to last, calls for un-Russian qualities of mind—for concentration of thought, for terse diction, and for thorough command of plot and situations. It is because of this that in the whole range of Russian literature we find scarcely a half-dozen plays which could successfully stand Western tests. There is Gogol's *Revisor*, according to our minds the best Russian drama. Then there are a couple of interesting plays by Gribaeyedoff and Ostrovski, and the cycle of three national tragedies by Count Alexis Tolstoi. That really comprises all that is first-class in the Russian drama. All the other plays are but mediocre, according to our Western notions, though individually there is much good in many of them, single scenes being often true to life and full of a peculiar charm. In fact, viewed purely as *drames de mœurs*, not a few are inimitable.

But epic and lyric poetry is very fine in the Russian

tongue. The two earlier writers, Lermontoff and Pushkin, alone suffice to range Russia on the level of Western nations. But the peculiar excellence attained by Russian literature is all in the line of the novel, character sketch, short story, popular tale, and so on. In this field, the special form of the Russian mind comes to the writer's aid.

Indeed, the Russian has a very acute perception of form, and he is a keen observer and shrewd critic. All that helps him greatly in this department of literature.

To these advantages must be added the immeasurable advantage of idiom. The Russian language is of a wonderful richness and flexibility, permitting the writer to adapt his thought precisely to his words. It easily expresses every shade of meaning, even the faintest, as well as every mood. In that respect it is without doubt the most perfect instrument for a literary worker. No other modern tongue approaches it in these particulars. True, it could not be styled a "scientific" language, and works of abstract reasoning or of exact definition, such as philosophical or legal writings, could not be adequately couched in Russian; they suffer greatly in the translation. But, on the other hand, Russian literary works on their part lose much of their original flavour by a rendering into any other tongue, more than would translations from the Italian, English, German, or French. This fact accounts for the totally different impression which the writings of such masters of description and conversation as Gogol,

Turguenieff, Terpigoreff, and Gorki make on the mind of the reader when perused either in the original or in any kind of translation.

The greatest, perhaps, of all psychological novels ever written in any literature is Dostoyeffski's *Crime and Punishment*, when read in the original. The hero of this weird tale, Raskolnikoff, is a poetic creation so microscopically faithful to conditions of a particular class of Russian society that to understand him is to understand that odd being, the Russian student. There can be nothing—certainly nothing outside of *Hamlet*—showing more intuitive genius than the author has put into the conversation between the undiscovered yet repentant criminal, Raskolnikoff, and the police officials trying to trace the culprit. The psychological *finesse* displayed in this part of the novel is an unmatched masterpiece in the world's fiction.

Or, looking at other departments of fiction, what could be more finished in its way than Aksakoff's *Family Chronicle*, or the tales of Turguenieff? By perfectly simple, apparently naïve means, in limpid and quite natural language, we here gaze down to the very bottom of the Russian soul, and are enabled to fathom its complexities. What warmth in the description of men and nature! Or, taking Terpigoreff's greatest story, *Decadence*—it is a veritable treasure-trove for the student of Russian social conditions, so minute and photographically correct.

The youngest of the Russian writers have turned

purely realists, and that means for a country like Russia that there is much more black and grey than white on their palettes. Much of their writing is not to Western taste. But they all show the excellences mentioned before. Of course, the Russian tongue has the demerit of its virtues. It is not made for the drawing-room, and for an elegant *causerie* it is not so good a vehicle as French would be.

One other peculiarity of Russian literature must be noted. It is particularly rich in sarcasm and irony, and this fact again is due both to the national character (which thus finds an only vent for a discontent otherwise not permitted to express itself) and to the national language. This form of Russian writing, though, lends itself least of all to translation and foreign appreciation, for it demands of the reader a thorough acquaintance with Russian conditions. To the Western mind the endless *persiflage* at the expense of Russian bureaucracy becomes rather tedious, though it is intensely relished by the Russian reader.

## CHAPTER X

### INTERNAL RACE STRIFE

**Traditional Hatred of the Russian for Pole, Tartar, and Turk—Unfortunate Coincidence of the Rise of the Press and the Introduction of Reforms under Alexander II. with the Date of the Polish Uprising in 1863—Arousal of the Russian Jingo Spirit—Since the Sixties the Katkoff Party and its Disciples Engaged in a Campaign of Russification Aimed at All the Non-Russian Elements Residing within the Borders of the Empire—Poland the First to Suffer—Next Came the Baltic German Provinces—Lastly, Finland and the Caucasus Populations, Particularly the Armenians—How the Czarish Government Found itself between Two Main Currents of Russian Aspiration—The Choice in Favour of the Jingo Current a Matter of Internal Necessity**

SINCE the Romanoffs became the ruling dynasty in Russia, in 1613, national consciousness had slumbered complacently for precisely two hundred years. It awoke with furious energy when Napoleon I., with his countless hosts, invaded "Holy Russia." Since then the sentiment has gone on growing. National anger was rekindled by the Polish uprising of 1830, but in a far higher degree by the one of 1863. Deeply settled in the Russian mind was the belief that next to the Tartars and Turks the hereditary foe was still the

Pole, although for many years past fear of the re-establishment of Polish supremacy had ceased.

A new increment of this national consciousness was added by the gradual spread of a measure of education, having in its wake a similarly slow awakening of interest in public things, furthered above all by the press. For, shackled as it was, the press nevertheless has been a larger factor in bringing about to a certain degree modern conditions in Russia than all other factors combined. To-day there is scarcely a village within the vast empire where there resides not at least one subscriber to a Russian newspaper or magazine, and such vehicles of intelligence are read, nay, pored over with far greater attention than the hurried Western reader devotes even to his favourite sheet.

True, the great mass of the peasantry (and we must never forget that the peasantry practically mean the whole Russian nation) have not even to-day any general conception of state and government, not even the dimmest. All things political in their minds embody themselves in Czar and Church. And blindly they follow the lead of these two powers. This again is largely a matter of tradition, for during the centuries-long warfare with the Tartars, Poles, and Turks, the Russian peasant had come to associate in his mind the idea of Czar and Church with the very existence of the nation.

Nevertheless, by natural disposition the Russian is peace-loving, and of his own accord he never favours aggressive war, though he is strong in defence. The

Russian call to arms, which even to-day inflames every village when uttered: "They are attacking our men!" is a call for defence, not of aggression.

Peter the Great made, so to speak, the nobility the "serfs of the government," compelling every noble to serve him, for a longer or shorter term, either in the army or in the civil administration. Thus it was that the nobility in Russia alone participated in political life, so far as that could be done under a despotic form of government. All internal Russian uprisings, with the single exception of Pougatcheff's, were conceived and led by the nobility. There have been, it is true, numberless peasant riots, and they were particularly frequent during the reign of Nicholas I. But all these riots were not of a political nature; they were solely due to local oppression, be it on the part of noble or official.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the Russian nobility became more or less imbued with Western ideas, and in mode of thought and manner of living they changed greatly. Within this nobility, particularly its lower strata, a species of public opinion formed itself which might or might not oppose the existing régime, but which in any case was independent of it and knew how to impose itself upon the country. This portion of the Russian nobility was the one which Europe most often heard from and by which too generally the Western mind has measured the Russian nation as a whole. These were the talented but ex-

travagant Russian writers and journalists, the restless and revolutionary university students, and the philosophising and endlessly reflecting Russians met abroad. Together they produced an enormous volume of sound, discordant but impressive. Turguenieff paints them to the life in his *New Earth*. But though noisy this element was but the fraction of one per cent. of the whole nation, and though it influenced it in a measure, it would be most untruthful to call these men the leaders of Russian thought. All the same, when a czar had come at last in the person of Alexander II. to liberate the cowering millions of serfs, and when a reform era seemed to have set in, many persons even in Russia wrongly attributed all these new things to the aforementioned infinitesimal fragment of the nation.

The reforms of 1861–1864 happened to come simultaneously with the great Polish rising. This was a most unfortunate coincidence. For the reform measures of Alexander II. had stirred the whole nation to the very depths. A spirit of hope and a force of energy had been engendered by those liberal steps, and these surging sentiments were looking for a safety-valve. The Polish insurrection furnished that. The enthusiasm that had been kindled by imperial reforms now seized upon this great attempt of the Poles to throw off the Muscovite yoke. In all liberal and patriotic circles in Russia proper the motto was given out: Save the fatherland! Avenge the nation! In a word, the Polish uprising opportunely served as something like a

lightning conductor to excited Russian opinion. And incidentally this same Polish uprising proved the grave of the Russian internal reform movement. For it diverted for a considerable space of time the energies of the educated class in Russia into this new channel; it compelled Alexander II. to shelve his own liberal projects, and when at last Poland had been once more subdued, both Czar and nation had ceased for the time feeling any special interest in internal reforms. This view of the matter is one to which Western Europe has never given much attention. But, as a matter of fact, the consequences brought about for Russia itself by the Polish insurrection of 1863 were much more serious and far-reaching than those for Poland.

The young Russian press threw itself with a will into the problem of quelling the Polish insurrection, holding high the national flag and inflaming patriotism and national prejudices. In so doing this press fought side by side with the government and became the mouthpiece not only of the latter but also of almost the entire thoughtful portion of the Russian people. That again was, as subsequent events showed, a most deplorable thing. Inflamed Russian opinion, as represented by the press (which, by the way, during that particular period was left almost entirely unbridled), sanctioned the complete overthrow of Polish aspirations, and thus unwittingly made itself the catspaw of despotism.

But at last Poland lay prostrate, helpless under the

foot of the conqueror, and the Polish problem seemed solved. Quiet, the quiet of the graveyard, ruled along the borders of the Vistula. Then what was the Russian press, what was excited Russian public opinion to do? Evidently their mission must be to go on "saving the fatherland." And how else could that be done than by entering on a systematic campaign against all those populations annexed by Russia in the course of centuries which, like the Polish, were non-Russian in blood, creed, thought, and ideals? This afforded an immense programme, and a popular one. To Russify all these non-Russian elements became hereafter the great task which the Russian press and public opinion set themselves. For a time Czar Alexander II. and his government held aloof from this programme. But it gathered in momentum and strength, steadily and rapidly; it enrolled under its banner the leading men of Russia, and finally the government could no longer withstand its impetus.

While an autocracy the Russian government had all along been compelled to mind more or less the feeling of the great nobles, of the army and officials. During the sixties the Czarish autocracy suddenly found itself between two strong political currents. At the head of the one stood Katkoff, representing nationalistic tendencies, and urging on the complete assimilation of all non-Russian elements within the empire. Katkoff, a man of unusual ability and a fanatic of his convictions, was for a generation the dreaded editor and proprietor of

the Moscow *Vyedomosti*, and he knew how to make his organ the stormy voice of the most influential portion of the nation. For years he, his paper, and his personal influence were more feared even than the power of the Czar and his government. On more than one occasion of critical import he made, in fact, the latter his instrument. The other current, the Socialistic movement, was under the leadership of Alexander Herzen. Although the latter lived and died in exile, yet his influence with other strata of the Russian people was as great as Katkoff's. Through his paper, *The Bell*, published in London, but which through underground channels he circulated throughout Russia and which was even regularly read by the Czar, his court and government, he exerted an immeasurable influence over all that was liberal in the empire. These two currents attained an enormous sweep. The one, aggressively jingoistic and reactionary, made out of Mouravieff, the "hangman of Warsaw," a national hero, while the other saw first in Bakounin, a wild anarchist and conspirator, and later in Vera Sassulitch, its ideals. Between the two Alexander II. and his government could make but one choice, and that was towards the side of Katkoff.

And thus we see Russia's intellectual and material political forces since the sixties mainly engrossed with the task of bringing under the complete sway of Russia all her non-Russian elements.

Poland came first. Four years only were required

completely to subdue her. After Mouravieff had executed thousands of Polish rebels and sent many more thousands to the Siberian mines, after Kaufmann had performed similar services in Lithuania, the Russian jingo statesmen, Tcherkasski and Milyutin, products of Katkoff's teachings, concluded these Russifying labours by entirely changing the civil and military administration of Poland and bringing both very close indeed to Russian ideals. Poland, in fact, as a separate entity, ceased to exist. All her old privileges, sworn to by every Russian czar since the annexation days towards the close of the eighteenth century, were abrogated, one by one.

Then came the turn of the Baltic provinces, Livonia, Esthonia, and Courland. During the thirteenth century the Teutonic Knights had conquered these provinces and converted their pagan populations to Christianity, in the old-fashioned way, by fire and sword. They had set up an orderly form of government, and drawn German settlers and burghers to the conquered districts. The German settlers founded all the towns in these three provinces. Some of these towns, such as Riga, Mitau, Libau, Reval, Dorpat, became large and populous, and some count amongst the most important for Russia's sea trade to-day. The civilisation of the Baltic provinces was entirely German. Although numerically in a minority, the German element there had all along been the predominant one. Dorpat had become a German university, taking

equal rank in point of efficiency and original research with the best in Germany proper; it had also supplied Russia ever since the days of annexation in the eighteenth century with her brainiest and best administrators, generals, statesmen, and professional men. But, of course, this was all the more reason why the party of Katkoff insisted on the ruthless Russification of the Baltic provinces.

The process was inaugurated in 1867. Certain political changes in Germany afforded a welcome pretext to the Katkoff party to insist on their programme of denationalising the Baltic Germans. The North German Confederation had been founded as the outcome of Prussia's war with Austria, in 1866. Then came the unification of Germany and her rise as an empire, the outgrowth of the Franco-German War of 1870. The Russian jingoes declared, though there was not a scintilla of fact to back them up, that the Baltic provinces desired annexation by Germany, and that Bismarck's policy embraced this project. As a matter of fact, both contentions were untrue. The Baltic Germans had up to that time been very well satisfied as the prosperous inhabitants of three autonomous provinces of Russia. While bonds of race affinity and of identity of language and culture existed between Germany and the Baltic provinces, no idea had at any time been entertained by the German people or its statesmen of politically amalgamating these districts, separated as they were from the nearest German territory by hund-

reds of miles of intervening territory populated by non-German-speaking tribes.

Personally Alexander II. was greatly averse to a Russifying process in the Baltic provinces. On October 12, 1867, he received a representative delegation of these provinces, who had come to enter a formal protest against the carrying-out of the Katkoff programme. The monarch, whose German sympathies were avowedly very strong, received this delegation most kindly. In an address he made to them he professed no intention on his part or that of his government to aid in wresting from them their ancient privileges and autonomy. On the contrary, he assured them most emphatically that he would oppose to the utmost any such policy. He took pains to say that he was perfectly aware of the loyalty of his Baltic provinces and of the high value which they in their present condition had for Russia.

These assurances by Alexander II. were evidently quite sincere, but the situation had meanwhile grown to a point where it defied control by the nominal autocrat. In a foregoing paragraph we have seen the reasons for the inability of the imperial government to withstand the national propaganda. The events of 1870–1871 once more played into the hands of the Russian jingoes. They accused Alexander II. of having assisted in the unification of Germany and of having rendered moral and diplomatic aid to her during her struggle with France, thus having been instrumental

in erecting a new power on the western flank of Russia and thereby increasing very largely Russia's difficulties in her external policy. These reproaches, it must be admitted, were more or less founded in fact, and their justice did much in weakening Alexander II.'s position in his attempts to preserve the Baltic provinces as a separate political conformation. During the seventies, therefore, the Russification of the German-speaking provinces of Russia was in the main achieved. During the reign of Alexander III. the process was carried to extreme and brutal measures, and to-day not a spark of former Baltic liberties remains. The use of the Russian language in lieu of the German and of the Lettish and Esthonian (idioms spoken by the native lower classes there, largely in the rural districts) has been enforced. Russian administrative methods, with their corruption, inefficiency, and senseless formalism, have superseded the sensible and effective ones in vogue before. In a word, the Baltic provinces have become Russian to all outward semblance. The Holy Synod here as in Poland has been and is at work uprooting schism and heresy, and supplanting them by the tenets and practices of the Orthodox Church.

Underneath this surface, though, the Baltic provinces have become violently anti-Russian—politically, socially, and intellectually. The sons of well-to-do parents are now sent to Germany to receive their education. The conquest of these provinces by brute force has been no real benefit to Russia; on the contrary, it

has weakened her at one of the most vulnerable points in her territory during any future possible war with one of her Western neighbours, Germany or Austria, or both combined. It has alienated from her the most progressive element in her population.

Russia's war against Turkey in 1876–1877 was undertaken under the pressure of the same Russian jingo element, again headed by Katkoff, and against the decided wishes of Alexander II. At that time the Chernayeffs, Ignatieffs, and Skobeleffs were the banner bearers of the Panslavic movement, allied with the jingoes. The results of this war did not correspond to Russia's expectations. But it was not Bismarck and Germany, as the Russian jingoes at that time and ever since have claimed, who deprived them at the Congress of Berlin of their spoils, but the cunning statesmanship of Beaconsfield and England. Russia had put herself in the wrong at the very start, by overreaching herself. The time was not yet ripe for a Russian seizure of the Golden Horn.

Anyway, this very war had shown both the internal and external weakness of Russia, the paucity of her resources, and the lack of efficient generalship, even when grappling with so decadent a foe as Turkey.

However, Russian jingo opinion was not amenable to such lessons. After this war, as before, the internal race strife went on unremittingly. After the Baltic provinces, it was the turn of Finland. Alexander III. had begun in a half-hearted way to introduce Russifying

methods there. The present Czar, Nicholas II., personally a kind-hearted and well-meaning man though he be, took up this part of his late father's programme, and rode roughshod over all his own scruples of conscience, over the Constitution of Finland which he had solemnly sworn to protect, and over the high culture which the people of this North-western province of Russia, small in number but hardy and progressive in spirit, had built up on former Swedish foundations. It forms, humanly speaking, the darkest blot on the fair fame of Nicholas II. The process of Russification in Finland, carried on with the same brutal means which had distinguished the methods of Alexander III. in dealing with the Baltic provinces, has now proceeded far enough to discern the fact that Finland, too, is doomed to lose wholly her independence and her native culture, so superior to the Russian. Finland, it is safe to say, will be another Poland, another thorn in the flesh of Russia, in times to come.

The same ruthless process of thoroughly Russianising—which means lowering the intellectual and social level and estranging the feelings—her populations of foreign blood has been used against the Caucasian tribes of the Circassians, Lesghians, Georgians, the Tartars, and Armenians, all of them possessing qualities which in the future development of Russia would stand the empire in good stead. The Turcomans, another race of great slumbering potentialities, have likewise been alienated of recent years. Even the Little

Russians, though themselves of Russian blood, have suffered during the past two decades from this unhealthy craze for levelling all differences of customs and creed.

This feature of Russian internal policy during the last thirty years can scarcely be called by any other term than suicidal. A strange blindness to the best interests of the nation as a whole has smitten her rulers and governing classes.

Things would perhaps have taken another course if the hopes entertained very generally at the beginning of Alexander II.'s reign had been fulfilled. If the projects of that monarch had come to a healthy fruition, if Russia had indeed been incorporated with the civilised world, the jingo element—a curse though they have been to Russia's real interests—would probably have found other and worthier tasks to engage their attention. Instead of waging fierce race strife, the enormous programme of introducing and fostering internal improvement might have claimed their full energies. But it was the fate of Russia that that was not to be.

A race and religious war carried on by the central government and all its subordinate authorities against those portions of the population who differ from the majority, more or less, in creed and blood, ideals and customs, means far more for the empire of the Czars than it would for other countries. For the Russian is by no means a homogeneous nation. The census of

1897 shows, in round figures, more than one-third of the total population, namely, forty-four millions as against eighty-six millions, of non-Russian race. It so happens that these forty-four millions compose the vast majority in the border provinces of the empire, in other words, those provinces geographically most loosely connected with the whole. And it is also the case that these forty-four millions are (with the exception of the Central Asiatic part of them) the most advanced portion of the whole. Altogether there are counted in Russia, European and Asiatic, over two hundred tribes, hordes, and peoples of non-Russian blood, speaking as many idioms and belonging to scores of creeds, from the crude Shamanism of the Yakoots to the most elevated form of Christianity. But, leaving that consideration aside, by estranging the loyalty and affection of the most enlightened populations under the sway of the Czar, populations, too, holding the frontiers, Russia is committing an act of such gigantic folly that one must pause to wonder at it. In a future war, such as Russia is sure to have on her hands some day, the loyalty or disaffection of these border populations will alone be an enormous factor, worth whole army corps and making either towards her ultimate defeat or victory.

Meanwhile, in any case, the submerging of her most enlightened populations into the inchoate mass, the obliteration of a high degree of culture, which under normal conditions would be sure to benefit the entire

nation immensely—and that in every sphere of human activity—means a fearful loss of vital strength, a great weakening of all the forces making for a higher level of civilisation and prosperity. That no statesman has arisen in Russia to inculcate this palpable truth in the minds of Czar and government, is a sad misfortune for the nation.

## CHAPTER XI

### RUSSIAN BUREAUCRACY

The Bomb which Killed Alexander II., Twenty-three Years Ago, Killed also Projected Internal Reform—The Long and Bitter Struggle between the Handicapped Provincial Chambers and the Central Government—Though Hindered in Every Possible Way these Local Bodies have Accomplished Quite a Deal of Good—The Further Extension of their Powers Would Do Much to Neutralise the Great Harm Done by Centralising Bureaucracy—The Creeping in of Disloyal Elements within Russian Officialdom—Present Centralising and Monopolistic Tendencies—New Plans in this Direction—Popular Hatred of Bureaucracy—The Chief Faults of the Present Bureaucratic System: Unwieldiness of the Machine, Widely Diffused Corruption, Divergent Policies and Methods, Impossibility of Control, Aversion to Reform and to a Consideration of Popular Wants—Fiscality Extending in Russia—Workings of the New Liquor Monopoly—System of Supervising the Universities—The Rural District Captains—Some Amusing Specimens of Red-Tapeism—Political Forces in Russia and in English-Speaking Countries

THE bomb thrown on March 13, 1881, did more than tear the body of Alexander II. to pieces. When the Czar's lifeblood from his horrible wounds trickled into the deep snow, the sweeping reforms which that ruler had been on the point of authorising were also wiped out from the official slate of Russia. Alex-

ander III. succeeded to the throne, a man of radically different fibre, believing in suppression and oppression, in bald autocracy and in barbarous punishment for all those who held other views than his own regarding governmental methods in Russia. The reform programme of his father was shelved, and the dark-age methods of his grandfather, the despot, Nicholas I., restored. It was a great pity. When Alexander II. had set out from the Winter Palace on the last day of his life to take a sleigh-drive along the broad avenues of St. Petersburg, he had left on his desk, ready for his signature, an instrument which after careful preparation for many previous months had found his sanction. That instrument put in force would have placed Russia squarely on the path leading to eventual self-government. It was a wise and thorough reform measure, admirably adapted to the peculiar needs of Russia and to the particular bent of the national character. Its chief provisions enlarged the scope of the provincial representative chambers, granting greater powers of taxation for local improvements, and giving them in most respects authority to act independent of the organs of the central government.

The assassination of the Czar-Liberator by a band of fanatic Nihilists plunged Russia back into the old mire of bureaucratism and corruption. And there the country is wallowing still.

The *zemstva* (provincial chambers) had first been created by Alexander II. early in his reign. These

bodies were composed by him in the main of rural landholders, nobles and thoroughly acquainted with the conditions and needs of their special provinces. But we have seen elsewhere that the whole class of noble estate-owners was thoroughly disorganised and brought to a frightful pass by the effects of serf emancipation. It was partially owing to their rapid demoralisation that these provincial chambers from the start did not accomplish as much in the betterment of provincial government as had been expected of them. But another very important factor of their small success was the determined opposition and the bitter animosity shown by the entire body of the governmental bureaucracy to this new and rival institution. In every possible way the large and influential body of government officials antagonised and hampered the *zemstva*. The strongest kind of pressure was also from the start brought to bear in St. Petersburg, on the Czar as well as on his cabinet, to curtail the powers granted these provincial representative bodies. It was skilfully insinuated that the provincial chambers were constantly trying to abridge the Czarish power, and these insinuations were more or less believed. Thus, from the first, the provincial chambers had to contend with difficulties which in the long run they were unable to surmount. One by one the original powers and privileges conferred upon them were taken away or rendered ineffective, and within a certain number of years this reform measure was made a dead letter.

Even within the sphere of activity left them the provincial chambers, as was but natural, made many mistakes and took many false steps. These, of course, were exploited to their disadvantage by the bureaucracy to the utmost.

Nevertheless, within their ever-narrowing limits these provincial chambers have accomplished a vast amount of good for rural Russia. To mention just a few of the benefits due to them it may be said that they successfully combated epidemic diseases of cattle and horses. The epizoötic which swept repeatedly during the seventies and eighties through Russia, as it did through Europe and the United States, was brought to a halt by the joint and efficient efforts of the *zemstva*. Medical attendance in the rural districts was enlarged and put on a more rational plane. The ravages of Asiatic cholera, smallpox, and typhus were kept within narrower bounds. The curse of quackery was limited. Famines were met by more or less well-organised action. Hospitals were founded in the country districts. These things were just a few among those attempted and carried out more or less successfully by the provincial chambers. The lower-class public schools organised and maintained by them are even to-day the best of their kind in Russia.

However, bureaucracy had been all-powerful in Russia before the advent of the provincial chambers, and the victory in the strife between it and the latter remained for many years with the organs of the central

government. It is to the discredit of the present ruler, Nicholas II., that he has not only taken no steps until the present day to restore the provincial chambers to their former powers, but that he has actually cut them down still further and has put the bureaucracy on the old footing of virtual omnipotence. This has made bureaucratism—for many years past one of the most serious hindrances to Russia's internal progress—the greater drawback since the annexation of far-away countries in Central Asia and on the confines of China, because of the increasing difficulty of holding in proper check the officials of the central government.

Another great trouble has arisen, this time within the very ranks of bureaucracy. Formerly, at least, these officials as a class were thoroughly loyal to the government, no matter how corrupt and open to bribery, how inefficient and averse to ameliorations they might be. Nowadays a very considerable portion of these government officials are drawn, not from the ranks of the higher and lower nobility as in the days gone by, but from the lower strata, from among the sons of former serfs, but more particularly from the priests' sons. The latter fill to-day an enormous number both of the higher and lower offices, and a very large percentage of them, while hard-working and in a sense more efficient, are secret adherents to all sorts of revolutionary doctrines. This state of the case was hinted at in a previous chapter. It constitutes a very real danger for the central government, all the more as

these pushing men cannot be supplanted by others, perhaps less diligent but more loyal. The percentage of lower-grade nobles among the government officials of Russia has been steadily declining, owing to various reasons. Practically, it is the "pope's son" who today is the determining factor within the ranks of the Russian bureaucracy, and there is no telling at this hour what this fact ultimately will lead to, unless the only remedy that will work a thorough cure be adopted by the Czar and his government, namely, the very considerable enlargement of the sphere of usefulness of the provincial chambers.

Of all the Russian ministers of state that have exerted influence on this present Czar and his predecessor, it was Goremykin alone who consistently advocated this last-mentioned remedy. He it was who not only spoke strongly in favour of giving a wider scope to the existing *zemstva* (in forty-six out of the seventy-one provinces of European Russia), but who also championed the introduction of this institution in the remaining twenty-three provinces, these being the ones forming the Western border districts. How it comes that Witte, so sagacious a man not in finances alone but also in other departments of government, and who for ten years past has been the prime mover within the whole governmental machinery, has not officially adopted this view of the matter, is a thing inexplicable at first blush. But on closer view the reasons become palpable. To carry out unhampered his financial

programme, Witte necessarily had to stand in the other camp. Provincial chambers, no matter of how much benefit to agriculture and to interior conditions of Russia, would have been a serious hindrance to his plans.

The army of employees under the direction of the Minister of Finance is an enormous one. With a salary list of over three hundred million roubles he has hundreds of thousands under his thumb. In 1899 the number of employees on the Russian state railroads alone figured up 339,000; since then, with the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad and its branches this number has risen to close on half a million. Adding to this number all the employees engaged on the domanial estates and in the government forests, the vast crown lands, the postal and telegraph service, and the total number of persons employed within the civil administration cannot fall short of a round million. Witte did not wish to create a serious competitor by furthering the extension of prerogatives and duties apportioned to the provincial chambers. The Crown in Russia contributes since 1900 an average of fifty-seven per cent. to the revenues of the national government, derived from all the above-named departments. The fiscus is owner of two-fifths of all the soil within European Russia, not counting the enormous domains and estates in Asia. Most of it, it is true, is forest or unimproved steppe land, but enough of it is left producing regular incomes to make the finance minister the man-

ager of the largest territory in the world. The state, again, is the responsible manager or owner of other huge enterprises, such as mines, foundries, carshops, and the monopolised liquor trade. All this reduces the burden of taxation to the Russian taxpayer, and it fills the national treasury, but it seriously diminishes the field of enterprise left for the individual subject. True wisdom would consist in throwing open as many new avenues of individual activity to the subject as possible, but we must not forget that that would mean the entire revolutionising of Russia's fiscal and financial policy. Witte, fond of power, and ambitious, can scarcely be seriously blamed for not deeming such a task his own. To carry it through successfully would, besides, require very different statesmanlike qualities than those Witte has shown himself possessed of.

It has here been taken for granted that Russian bureaucracy, as at present constituted, is a great evil. In this assumption we follow but the almost unanimous opinion of educated Russia itself. Libraries of serious works have been written by patriotic Russians denouncing the present bureaucratic system. The whole of Russian literature for the past sixty years has teemed with uncomplimentary reference to it. A Russian novel is sure of popularity with the entire reading public of the empire if it be full of censure, sarcasm, or irony at the expense of the hated *tchinovnik* (government official). But all this denunciation, it may be urged, is not proof. And that is very true. It will,

however, require but a very short argument to show that the popular verdict in Russia against bureaucracy is founded, as such a verdict nearly always is, on good and sufficient reasons.

The first point that tells against this system is its unwieldiness. That fact scarcely needs elaboration. In the very nature of things a government located at the north-western extremity of a vast empire comprising a territory covering one-sixth of the earth's solid land, distant from the other frontiers by from two thousand to almost six thousand miles, cannot perform its functions efficiently and economically. Especially is this the case with such a centralised government as is the Russian, one which attempts to regulate not at the local point where action is needed, but at the central seat, even the minutest affairs as well as the largest and most important. There is an incredible amount of red-tape to overcome, there are so many layers of subordinate authority to pierce before the final and decisive head is reached, that to accomplish anything there must be a frightful loss of time and energy. Years are often required before a small but urgent change can be made, a new administrative step can be taken, or any measure of local interest can be effected. All this is self-evident. It alone amounts to a thorough condemnation of the present system.

Owing to the immensity of the government machine, a Russian minister does not know personally the officials serving in his department in the provinces. A

Russian public opinion, such as exists in Western countries, there is none, save on a few general questions. Thus, while the conduct and official character of a government employee may be violently disapproved in the district where he serves, and while certain acts or measures of the government may be clearly harmful in a certain locality and generally recognised as such, these local opinions and convictions will scarcely ever get to the knowledge of the central government. In that way they remain ineffective. Thousands of incompetent, corrupt, or otherwise grossly derelict officials remain in their places and ascend the government ladder in due time, until they reach one of the very highest rungs, simply because the facts concerning them have never come to the ears of their chiefs in St. Petersburg. The debasing influence of all this on the individual official needs no pointing out.

Another outgrowth of this system is the wide spread of official corruption. Nothing is done in Russia today, any more than it could be done in the past, without "greasing the palm," as the popular phrase goes, of the officials to whose province the matter belongs. It is true that in one or two departments this corruption is no longer carried on on so large a scale as it was several generations ago. Witte's department, for one, shows decided improvement in this respect. But the fact remains that with the single exception of the higher and highest courts of justice, corruption and bribery are regular features of Russian administration. Good

and impartial judges of the situation claim that since the days antedating the reform era of Alexander II. corruption has never been so widespread as it is under the present ruler. The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad and its branches was accompanied with fraudulent practices which cost the government several hundreds of million roubles. The commissary department committed, during the period of the Boxer troubles in China, a series of embezzlements as outrageous and unscrupulous as were those during the war with Turkey, in 1876–1877.

Intimately connected with the peculiar nature of the present system is the divergency in general policy and methods followed in the different provinces of the empire. This divergency goes so far that it is a standing feature to see one ministry waging war upon another, defeating those very aims of one department which have found most favour with the friends of reform. In this respect it is proper to speak of "decentralisation." These facts are notorious. To the non-Russian world there comes, now and then, a piece of news which, like a flash, lights up the general situation. The manner, for instance, in which the Kishineff massacre of Jews was organised, not so long ago, and the way in which in that matter one department of the government was holding very different views from the other, and giving effect to these views, is a striking illustration. During the court proceedings following in the wake of the massacre itself, it was brought out very plainly that the

Minister of the Interior, M. de Plehve, had prepared at long range this whole anti-Jewish uprising through a number of his subordinate police officials, some of them sent for that very purpose from St. Petersburg. Again, in the matter of university discipline and university riots, the governor-general of such an important province as Moscow for years took an entirely different view and enforced an entirely different practice from the one followed in St. Petersburg or Odessa. These cases might be multiplied, but the above will suffice to indicate the general trend of this evil.

And in the main, the cause of this evil is the impossibility for a minister or the Czar to control the actions and the general policy of subordinate government organs. This, again, is due to the aforementioned unwieldiness of the whole machine.

It is but in consonance with frail human nature that an immense body of practically irresponsible government officials is averse to reform of any kind. This general law is aggravated in the case of Russia by national indolence, and thus it comes about that rarely, if ever, the real wants of the population are taken into serious consideration by the bureaucracy. In fact, given the present system, it is hard to see how even an especially well-disposed official can accomplish much good of his own volition. Nor are such efforts at all encouraged by his superiors. They at once scent in such a policy an infringement of their own, and suspect such a white raven of sinister designs.

The rivalry between the central government and the provincial chambers was pointed out before. It was due to it, for instance, that in many recent cases the organised efforts of either or both to fight a public evil came too late to benefit the masses. Neither of the two wanted to yield to or to co-operate with the other. The latest instance of the kind was the scurvy plague in the Eastern provinces, which during the last two years has ravaged among the poorer classes. The widespread suffering it caused was admittedly due to an insufficiency of cereal nourishment. Both central and provincial governments were willing to help, but the wrangling that ensued between these two organs was so bitter and led to such a loss of time that meanwhile thousands of lives were sacrificed needlessly.

Fiscality in Russia is assuming larger and ever larger proportions. At present the question is being seriously considered whether it will not be wise, in view of the great revenues annually drawn from the government liquor monopoly, to also convert the whole tobacco and sugar beet cultures into government monopolies. This, no doubt, would further increase the revenues of the central government, but it would also lead to an almost complete realisation of state socialistic conditions. Witte himself has repeatedly given expression to his conviction that the bringing about of such conditions is desirable. Sound students of social economy will differ from him. Certainly the further restriction of indi-

vidual enterprise in Russia will intensify the present unhealthy state of economics.

The effects of the recently introduced government monopoly in the distilling and sale of spirits and other alcoholic beverages, so far as these can be discerned, are not very encouraging, save in the one fact of increasing the government revenues. The monopoly has ruined many thousands of small dealers, distillers, innkeepers, and owners of village dramshops; this has increased by so many the army of vagrants and paupers within the empire. The monopoly has also deprived the cities, towns, and villages of a large and important part of their revenues, in many cases this particular revenue being the largest item in the municipal or village household. The city of Moscow sent a formal complaint to the central government, setting forth the fact of its financial loss and asking for an adequate reimbursement, the sum of one hundred thousand roubles annually being suggested. The petition was rejected; so, too, were those of hundreds of smaller towns and villages. Similar losses in revenue, owing to this same monopoly, are reported from the southern provinces of Russia and the Caucasus, the important and growing viniculture of those districts being most unfavourably affected. In the Baltic provinces, again, six hundred rural inns, usually the only shelter for the night open to carters and draymen, were forced to close their doors. The sale of beer, the favourite beverage there, has been restricted to the government stores.

With all that, the consumption of liquor, beer, and wine has not decreased since the introduction of the monopoly; quite the reverse. Nor has drunkenness diminished. One per cent. of the net returns from the sale of all alcoholic beverages is being devoted by the finance minister to promote the temperance movement. But while this is done, his subordinates in the provinces, as well as those of the other departments, discourage in every way the spread of this same temperance movement, and place hindrances of every kind in the way of the temperance societies. As far as statistics go, every budget since the introduction of the monopoly shows rapidly increasing sales of spirits, and for the last year the excess of such sales over the figures of ten years ago is fully thirty per cent.

The growth of fiscalism and of interference on the part of the central government in every sphere of private and public life is very noticeable. Everything is turned to the advantage of the state, that is, of its receipts, without consideration for the real needs of the population at large. Thus, for instance, the duties on iron and agricultural machinery are so high that the peasant to-day cannot afford to put tires on the wheels of his waggons and carts, and that the Russian has to pay double the price for agricultural machinery which his competitor to the West pays. The importation of fertilisers is likewise made impossible by a prohibitive duty, while the exportation of home-made fertilisers is in every way encouraged. This, in a country suffering

severely in its formerly most fertile provinces from an exhausted soil, is a fair sample of the short-sighted fiscalism of the Russian government. The inefficient management of the railroads, particularly their freight departments, is another burden resting on both agriculture and industry. Frequently merchants or landowners receive consignments by rail from four to six weeks too late.

The present peculiar system of superintending the universities of the country dates from the seventies. It put the appointment of the whole teaching corps, as well as the entire interior management, into the hands of the government. The two jingo leaders in Moscow, Katkoff and Leontyeff, were responsible for this change. During the reign of Alexander III., the shackling of the universities was completed. The students are all under police surveillance, all student affiliations and fraternities of whatever nature are prohibited and offenders rendered liable to transportation to Siberia, while all the able and independent leaders of thought have since been dismissed from their professorial chairs and supplanted by weak-kneed mediocrities. One of the most shining lights of modern chemistry, Prof. Mendelyeff, has been transferred to a post in the Imperial office of weights and measures. The independence of the courts—for long a green oasis in the arid desert of bureaucratism—has of late years been more and more interfered with. The hours of impartial jurisdiction in the higher courts of Russia are evidently

numbered. In 1889 all the justices of the peace were, one fine morning, by a special ukase of Alexander III., dismissed from office and succeeded by "Rural District Captains," men of no legal education whatever. The reasons for this sweeping change have never been made public, but its effects have unquestionably been very injurious to the cause of justice.

Of these "Rural District Captains" there are at present 2012, distributed in the thirty-six interior provinces. They exercise exclusively the functions of lower judges and arbitrators between the peasantry, the government, and the higher classes, and their position is a most important one.

How cumbrous and slow is the governmental machine in Russia results, among other things, from the failure to work up for public use the figures and facts ascertained by the last census of 1897. A huge commission has been struggling with this mass of material for the past seven years, involving an expense to the country of four million roubles, and until the present only about one-tenth of its work has been accomplished. To obtain concessions for the publication of newspapers, the operation of printing establishments, and, in fact, of any other kind of shop, factory, etc., requires an average of several years, and at every stage of its slow progress through the various channels of the government the petitioner must "grease the palm" of a score of officials. Russian newspaper editors have made this feature of the internal administration of their country a

standing subject of pleasantry and racy humour. In one of the leading sheets, a couple of years ago, a decree could be read in fat type setting forth the all-important fact that "His Imperial Majesty the Emperor" and so forth, had granted his "all-highest permission" to absolve the pupil Sinaida Koshevnikoff (follows class, school, town, district, and province, together with the date) from a certain branch of instruction, because of the young girl's poor health. The humour in this consisted in the fact that by the time this "all-highest permission" was given and published the girl had finished her studies at this same school about two years before. The case, however, was typical of Russian conditions.

An amusing calculation was published some time ago in a Moscow paper. It set forth that in case any member of the Imperial ministry had to undertake a trip abroad, the officials of the whole empire had to be apprised of it by no less than seventeen thousand circular letters.

Mention has been made of the opposing views and practices held by different departments of the government. An illuminating instance of this may be cited. All through the long régime of M. Bogolepoff, the Minister of Public Instruction, discipline in the educational institutions under his charge was of the most rigid and repressive. At the same time all those schools and colleges under the supervision of M. de Witte, the finance minister (and their number comprised many of

the most important), were governed in a most liberal spirit, and discipline in them was, if it erred in any direction, rather too lax. Bogolepoff was, it may be remembered, finally murdered by one of his exasperated victims.

In conversation with the thoughtful Russians of every type the opinion is invariably expressed that an empire so vast cannot be otherwise ruled than by a strong monarchical form of government. Many of them add that this necessarily means centralistic as well. In Western countries opinion seems to be very divided on this score. But it would seem indeed that for a nation composed, as has been shown, of so many heterogeneous elements and on such a low level of political education, monarchy is the only form possible. It is safe to say that at the present stage a parliamentary form of government would not be feasible for Russia, and a republican still less so.

It is another question whether this monarchic form ought to be accompanied by such strong centralistic tendencies as at present prevail. In the foregoing we have seen a number of most serious evils growing out of this centralism. Some others could be further adduced. And on the face of the facts it would appear that that form of government would be best adapted to the real interests of Russia which would put in the hands of clean and able provincial administrative bodies, chosen, perhaps, partly by the population and partly by the central government, that amount of dis-

cretionary power in the matter of the raising of taxes and effecting local improvements and local legislation, which would best suit local needs and conditions, reserving at the same time for the central government supreme power not only in rectifying serious mistakes made by such local bodies, but also to direct the destinies of the nation in its relations to foreign countries and to the welfare of the whole. Such a system, it would seem, could not be too difficult to discover and put in practice, provided the task were honestly undertaken and as honestly carried out. So far, however, no Russian statesman has arisen able to convince his master of the necessity of such a great change.

Loris Melikoff, summoned by Alexander II. during the last year of that well-meaning and able monarch (and, by the way, Melikoff was an Armenian, not a national Russian), drew up a scheme of reform which ultimately might have led up to such a sweeping change if—a very unfortunate "if"—the Czar had not been murdered before the ukase providing for this first beginning in reform had been signed and issued. Nicholas II. has neither brains nor independence of character enough to conceive of his own accord and then carry out such a one or a similar measure. On the contrary, he has been, since his accession to the throne, under the more or less complete domination of a few chief advisers, possessed of strong will-power of their own and imbued with reactionary spirit. In this respect the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobyedonostseff, has

been his evil genius during the ten years of his reign. And the latter more recently has been strongly backed up by M. de Plehve, while M. de Witte has, as we have seen, for reasons of his own, generally refrained from actively interfering in the political administration of the empire, keeping himself more or less strictly to the task of realising his ambitious financial and industrial programme.

To enforce such a thorough political change as we have outlined in the above, Russian bureaucracy would, of course, have to be overcome and greatly modified. It is probable that this would mean the dismissal of the majority of the present body of officials. Inured to the old system, they would be mentally and morally unable to accommodate themselves to the new one. And such wholesale dismissal would naturally bring about, for a time at least, much embarrassment. The Russian name for bureaucracy, *tchin*, is a Chinese word, and the sign that stands for it, or rather the hieroglyphic, is likewise of Chinese origin. Both were brought into Russia by the Mongolian dynasty of Djenghis Khan, which ruled the Slavs for centuries. The whole system, too, is Chinese, which means rigid and unprogressive. This alone would seem to show what a hard task the man would have on his hands who would undertake to modernise and liberalise the Russian *tchin*. But it could be done by any czar with backbone enough to stick to his idea, though he would need to have the single-hearted support of an able statesman, and he

would likewise have to be strong enough to eliminate from his council of advisers all counter-currents.

One of the Chinese features of Russian bureaucracy seems to be a contradiction of the rest of the system, namely, its lack of stability. But that is meant not of the system itself but of the positions and the place of residence to which each official is assigned. The prevailing system consists in leaving no official long enough in any post to assimilate himself with the population and with its thought and wants. The underlying idea probably being to prevent a loosening of the ties that bind the official, not to the people, but to its ruler and its autocratic government. The all-pervading hatred felt by the whole nation for its corps of officials has probably something to do with the above fact, making as it does merely a "stranger dwelling in tents," a man unidentified with the most vital needs of the population amongst whom he resides, out of every office-holder. Else the bitter feeling of contempt and aversion entertained for him by the nation as a whole could scarcely be explained.

If one should attempt to draw a parallel, so far as the innate political forces are concerned, between Russia and either England or the United States, there would be no end of differences. But the most pregnant, perhaps, is that in Russia these forces are entirely concentrated in the hands of the government, ignoring almost wholly those of the people and of the individual, while in English-speaking countries, with their old heirloom

of Anglo-Saxon political development, these political forces are held in the hands of the people themselves and but sparingly delegated, and usually only for a brief term of years, to self-chosen or—rather the exception than the rule—to hereditary leaders or rulers. While, therefore, in Russia all individual initiative and enterprise is hampered or killed in the bud, rendering more and more difficult the gradual growth of the nation, viewed as individuals, to independence and material prosperity, the Anglo-Saxon system must have and does have precisely the opposite effect, educating each single member of the commonwealth to higher and more efficient effort, thus producing an invincible whole, although (as a correlative fact) the brute effect and the impetus of the masses, led by a single will, must be greater. This shows most clearly when comparison is made between the foreign policy of Russia on the one side, easily grasped and concentrated in the one autocratic hand, and that of either the United States or England, depending as it does almost wholly on public opinion and its fluctuating moods, therefore more or less vacillating.

Such parallel or comparison, however, is but an idle amusement. The hard, concrete facts stare Russia in the face. How will she square in the long run her internal weakness with her external aggressiveness? That is the question.

# CHAPTER XII

## CHIEF REFORMS NEEDED

The Desirability of Abolishing the *Mir* Conceded by Nearly All Thinking Russians—To Expand the Scope and Powers of the Provincial Chambers Likewise Held of Chief Importance—Nicholas II. and his Prime Advisers, however, Have so far Strenuously Opposed the Last-Named Reform Measure—Facts as to the Gradual Curtailment of Prerogatives Originally Granted these Provincial Representative Bodies—The Principal Reason for This: Fear of Abridging the Czarish Power—Views of Alexander II. on this Matter Expressed to the Russian Ambassador in London—At Present the Provincial Chambers are the Mere Shadows of their Former Selves—The Problem of Provincial Autonomy, as Affecting, Respectively, the Purely Russian and the Western Border Provinces—Instances Illustrating the Evils Wrought by the Prevailing Tendency towards Uniformity—Provincial and Local Autonomy the Goal Striven for by Both Russian and Non-Russian Subjects of the Empire—The Cossacks Strikingly Show the Great Good which such Semi-Independence from the Central Government and its Organs Would Bring to the Nation as a Whole—A Parallel with Russia at the Close of the Crimean War

IN the preceding parts of this book frequent reference has been made to those two peculiarly Russian institutions, the *mir* (village community) and the *zemstvo* (provincial chamber). A more circumstantial treatment of this subject seems, however, required, forming

as it does the very core of Russia's internal political condition. To abolish the one and to enlarge the other seem things absolutely required to effect a radical change making for the gradual betterment of the political and social situation of the masses.

During the ten years elapsed since Nicholas II. ascended the throne, nothing has been done to improve matters in this respect. Nay, so far as the *zemstva* are concerned, there has been steady decline. Shortly after the accession of the present Czar, the leading provincial chambers of the empire addressed petitions to the throne praying for a restitution of their former powers, and citing an abundance of important and cogent facts in support of this. All the other provincial chambers, without committing themselves to formal petition, declared publicly their entire consonance with the purport of the latter. Nicholas II. and his cabinet curtly rejected all petitions of this kind, and since then have in every way discouraged agitation in favour of an enlargement of provincial prerogatives. Not long ago the *zemstvo* of Tver renewed their petition, only to be harshly punished for doing so. The chief advisers to the Crown have all along pronounced in favour of stricter centralisation, although the fact has been and is staring them in the face that growing centralisation has wrought incalculable harm everywhere to local and provincial interests.

Let us marshal the main facts that bear on this matter.

M. de Witte, in a weighty memorial written by him in 1901, himself furnishes all the arsenal of material required to demonstrate very clearly the strong advisability of widening the scope and powers of the provincial chambers, although his own argument in that very interesting document winds up with a plea for "unresisting obedience" on the part of the Russian subject. This is all the more extraordinary as the whole trend of his thought in the foregoing part of the memorial makes in the other direction. The conclusion he arrives at and the advice he gives in the end read more like an afterthought *ad hoc* than anything else.

Regarding the *mir* nothing exists in recent Russian publications either of an official or unofficial character which could be interpreted as a well-balanced advocacy of the continuance of that institution. The best Russian authorities on the subject, Kostomaroff (the historian), the brothers Aksakoff and Alexander Herzen, pronounce uniformly and strongly against it. We have seen before that a movement has been afoot in Russia for a number of years past for the abolishment, first, of joint tax responsibility of the rural communes, and next, of joint ownership in land, and that the government itself has apparently been brought around to accept this as a desirable reform. The movement of late, though, seems to have been lost once more in the morass of bureaucracy.

It is of passing interest to note that it took a German traveller in Russia, Baron Haxthausen, fifty years ago,

to discover for the Russians that the *mir* was really a national and praiseworthy institution. Up to that time it had been generally recognised in Russia itself that the *mir* was nothing of the kind, but on the contrary a great impediment in Russia's road toward saner forms of government and more generally distributed prosperity. And Haxthausen had based his fallacy on entirely inadequate data, since controverted completely.

In the manifesto published by Alexander II., creating, on March 31, 1863, the provincial chambers as the "Orderly organs of local self-government," that monarch designates the latter as the basis of the entire social structure. That instrument continued: "We reserve to ourselves the right, as soon as practice has inured the population sufficiently for the purpose, to take all further and necessary steps for the greater development of these organs." A fortnight later, on April 14th, the Imperial Chancellor of Russia, Prince Gortchakoff, stated in a dispatch to the Russian ambassador in London: "The system thus adopted by our most serene monarch contains in itself the germ which with time and experience is to be further developed. Its purport is to lead to administrative autonomy, basing itself upon provincial and municipal institutions, such as took their rise in England and proved there the foundations of national greatness and well-being." In the same sense the Czar in August of the same year spoke to the Russian statesman, Milyutin. He said he was not averse to a representative form of government,

but that the Russians were not yet ripe for a constitution.

These, then, were the avowed views and convictions of Russia's government forty-one years ago. It has been briefly mentioned before that soon after the Russian bureaucracy took up the fight against these new ideas, and that by hook or crook they finally triumphed.

One by one the powers of the provincial chambers were curtailed or abrogated. In the year following, 1864, the first steps in this direction were taken; the independence of these bodies was limited. Their resolutions could now be inhibited by either the governor-general of the province or by the minister of the interior. Gradually this was done more and more frequently. By a resolution of the Imperial Senate, passed on December 16, 1866, the governors-general were empowered to refuse their sanction to the election of any persons by the provincial chambers whose "ideas and principles were suspected or proved to be noxious to the interests of the state." The year after the disciplinary powers of the presidents of provincial chambers (so-called Marshals of the Nobility) were greatly enlarged. The chambers themselves thereby were brought entirely under the control of these last-named officials and of the governors-general. In the year 1879 the governors-generals were granted the right to remove forthwith any officials appointed by the provincial chambers on belief or suspicion of their lack of "good intentions."

These provincial officials soon after were made almost entirely dependent on the central government.

Parallel with this the competency of the provincial chambers was diminished, step by step. By the law of November 21, 1866, their powers of taxation were limited greatly. They were deprived of their former control of the provincial school systems, a process requiring successive steps until the year 1874. Similarly provincial legislation in favour of improving the conditions of the peasantry was hampered and finally done away with. All the memorials and petitions of the provincial chambers, pointing out that they alone possessed the required knowledge of rural local conditions to benefit the prosperity of the peasantry, met with either no response or one wholly based on formal objections.

Most persistent and harmful was, however, the policy adopted by the central government in preventing joint action of the provincial chambers. Such joint action had been described in the original law creating provincial chambers as one of the prime desiderata. Nevertheless, since 1864 it became the settled policy of St. Petersburg to discourage by every means united provincial effort, such as, to accomplish lasting good, was necessary in cases of widespread epidemics and diseases of man or beast; in the construction of bridges, roads, and all other undertakings requiring co-operation on the part of several provinces. Even joint provincial researches in times of famine or agricultural depression, and such like matters, were prohibited.

Provincial press matters were regulated in the same spirit. At first, the proceedings of the provincial chambers could be printed without let or hindrance; provincial newspapers were permitted to discuss purely provincial affairs without interference by the censor. Much interest in such reports, debates, and discussions was shown by the whole nation, and the chief newspapers in St. Petersburg vied with those in the provinces in giving attention to questions of internal economic reform. Then came repression, curtailment, and finally entire prohibition. The provincial press as such ceased to exist, and the road towards internal reform so auspiciously taken came to a dead line.

The root, of course, of this strange policy on the part of the government was dark suspicion. The idea had gained prevalence in St. Petersburg that to encourage provincial independence or autonomy, to permit practical freedom of the press in the interior, and to allow these provincial representative bodies to join hands for common purposes, meant the furtherance of revolutionary ideas and practices, meant also the abridgment of Czarish power. With that the doom of the provincial chamber was virtually sealed.

Alexander II. in 1880 made up his mind once more to restore the provincial chambers to their old powers. The reform minister he called for the purpose, Loris Melikoff, at once received a perfect shower of petitions and memorials from all over the empire, in token of general joy felt at this movement. Of greatest weight

with him and his imperial master was the petition sent by twenty-five of the leading citizens of Moscow. It must be borne in mind that at this particular time, in 1880, Nihilistic conspiracies were rife. Several of the passages in this document are even to-day of interest.

> The progress of revolutionary activity [it said] is due mainly to the enforced silence of the provincial representative bodies. . . . Russian society is becoming firmer and firmer in the conviction that an empire as vast as ours, with its complicated social life, cannot be exclusively administered by officials of the central government. . . . The only means to help our country out of its present internal difficulties lies in the summoning of an independent assembly of representatives of the various provinces, in the share granted to such an assembly in the governing of the nation, and in the careful drafting of an instrument guaranteeing to the nation personal inviolability and liberty of thought and of word.

It is stated on reliable authority that this particular petition determined Alexander II. in the working out of a new reform instrument, something coming very near indeed to a national constitution—the same instrument, by the way, which had received his sanction and was lying on his desk in the Winter Palace on that dread March morning when he was brought back bleeding to death from the wounds inflicted by the Nihilist bomb.

From his son, Alexander III., nothing else could be expected than the entire abandonment of such a reform programme. In fact, he reverted back in his policy and practices to the dark days of his grandfather, Nicholas I. Russian historians have since said that

public morality in their country stood never at a lower ebb than during his reign. But, strangely enough, Nicholas II., kind-hearted and enlightened as he seems to be, to judge by his creation, the International Court of Arbitration at The Hague, has followed in these matters in his father's footsteps. And on June 25, 1900, he dealt the most vicious blow to provincial self-government by his law forbidding the annual increase of provincial taxes on realty by more than three per cent. annually. Thus, by closing the chief avenue of income to the provincial chambers, he has made it impossible for them to continue in even that modest measure of progress to which they were committed before.

To gain a general view of the situation it will, however, be advisable to cast a glance at Russia's Western border provinces. One by one they had passed under Russian sway, by right of conquest or otherwise. Little Russia by original treaty had its privileges as well as Poland and the Baltic provinces theirs, and as Finland had her separate constitution. There was nothing in this militating against the well-understood interests of the empire as a whole. The view taken was that these separate positions were to guarantee the further development of these provinces inhabited by non-Russian races, a development only possible by adhering to their historical traditions. These provinces, lying close to countries of higher culture, were to enable Western science, industry, technical knowledge, and more refined manners to find entrance in Russia itself.

This purpose has been accomplished in a measure. But after a while it was abandoned. One by one the special privileges of these Western provinces were taken away from them, and as much as possible they were reduced to the Russian level. Poland lost its constitution, its army, finally everything else that had been national. True, they had revolted several times, and thus a pretext was given. It was said in Russia that the safety of the country demanded the shackling of Poland and the Russification of Lithuania. It was also said that the safety of Russia demanded the entire uprooting and destruction of the German spirit and language in the Baltic provinces. When it came to the case of Finland, even this poor pretext was dropped.

But these special privileges had permitted all the border provinces, to nearly all of which nature had been a stepmother, to render efficient service to the Russian state and people as "bearers of civilisation," and at the same time to create within them model conditions of order, impartial justice, and general well-being. By destroying these auspicious conditions Russia has inflicted vital wounds on her own body, and has deprived herself of one of the most efficient means of internal progress.

Bureaucracy had triumphed. These border provinces, too, had thus been thrown open as grazing places to the corrupt Russian government official, and uniformity, or nearly that, had been established. The spiteful anger of the Russian jingoes at seeing con-

quered provinces in better material and intellectual condition than those of the conqueror, the heart of Russia, had been gratified. It was nevertheless utter folly.

Instead of striving to improve their own conditions, to try for special privileges suited to the conditions of Orel, Moscow, or Saratoff, they had achieved the retrogression of the borders. Russian jingo spirit rose. It found vent in the erection at Vilna of a monument to the Polish "hangman," Mouravieff, in fiendish provocation of Polish sentiment. And while at home every thoughtful Russian feels bitterly the bureaucratic outrages to which he is constantly exposed, and calls for reform, he rejoiced at the introduction of a similarly nefarious system in the Western provinces which had been flourishing up to that time.

Yet what do these border provinces desire? What else but a fair measure of this very provincial autonomy which the Russian patriot at home so ardently desires. Reason alone ought to teach him that what would be good for him ought certainly to be good for his more advanced neighbours in the Western provinces. In itself, for instance, the utter folly of forcing the Polish or the Baltic peasant, living under such different agricultural conditions, to adhere to the life of the Russian peasant in the "black-earth belt" ought to be patent to all. Yet it is precisely this senseless uniformity which during the present reign the government and bureaucracy of Russia have been trying to enforce.

Amusing in a certain sense are some of the stories told in Russia to-day of bureaucratic zeal in behalf of uniformity. Thus, it is credibly reported that a few years ago a man in St. Petersburg died from the effects of drinking a bottleful of liniment, which in his drunkenness he had mistaken for vodka. At once an order was issued by the central government forbidding all druggists within the empire hereafter to sell such liniment save on a doctor's prescription. The province of Vyetka had until recent years very good provincial schools. Another province, that of Vologda, had, on the other hand, a poor school system. Did the central government take measures to bring up the latter to the level of the former? On the contrary, it issued orders the clear purport of which was to bring Vyetka down to the standard of Vologda — all for the sake of uniformity. The province of Tver showed aspirations for a national constitution. The consequence is that all other provincial chambers are suspected of similar aspirations, and with Tver they are subjected to severely restrictive measures. Many more cases of the kind could be cited.

One more concrete case shall be mentioned, just because it strikingly illustrates in another direction the serious evils of centralisation. Since the Baltic provinces passed under Russian administration, more than thirty years ago, a number of proposed urgent legislative measures have been lying idly in the pigeonholes of the St. Petersburg government. Several of these

had been ready for promulgation by the Baltic chambers of notables when the annexation—or amalgamation, if that sounds better—took place. These were bills adjusting definitely the subject of dividing adequately and fairly peasant hereditary estates among the heirs, the settlement of rural water rights and privileges, etc. Both subjects are of immense importance to the Baltic provinces, where the peasant owns, generally speaking, holdings of considerable intrinsic value, and where agriculture is conducted intensively. Yet nothing has been done all these years to regulate these matters, despite innumerable petitions to that effect addressed to the central government. The answer has always been: Wait until the time similar legislation becomes feasible for the other parts of the empire. This answer in itself is an egregious absurdity, for the agricultural conditions of Russia proper, particularly of the "black-earth belt," are so utterly different from those of the Baltic provinces that uniform legislation for the two would under all circumstances work very serious mischief to one part or the other. The Baltic peasant is, as a rule, independent owner of a good-sized farm, with dwellings and outbuildings far better and more costly than those on half the estates of the Russian nobles. He has a strong sense of his proprietary rights, and is purely an individualist. How, therefore, can his needs and those of the Russian peasant, with his joint ownership in arable land, his joint tax responsibility, his miserable hovel, his want of cattle and

horses, his nomad life, tally with those of the former? But Russian bureaucracy to all these objections simply makes answer: There must be uniformity.

And as it is with the Baltic peasant, so it is, in larger or smaller measure, with the peasant in Little Russia, in Poland and Lithuania, in the Caucasus, and in the Armenian districts. One and the same shoe will not fit them all.

Now, it has been stated before that almost the entire class of thinking Russians is as firmly convinced of the need of decentralisation and of more or less pronounced provincial autonomy as is the non-Russian in the border provinces. Down almost to the concluding paragraphs in the weighty memorial from the pen of M. de Witte, published in 1901, and to which reference has been made before, the argument and more especially the facts cited all make in the same direction. Certainly, no unbiassed student of Russian conditions of to-day can fail to note the utter inadequacy of the present centralising system for the well-understood interests of the country. It is the same everywhere, only in varying degree, whether we turn to purely Russian provinces like Tamboff and Orel, Moscow and Tver, Kostroma and Vologda, or to the border provinces. The thoughtful men of Russia, so far as they do not belong to bureaucracy, and have their judgment not warped by purely selfish interests, all agree that autonomy, the proper safeguarding of local and provincial interests, is the chief step necessary to put the empire as a whole

on a sound economic basis, the only remedy which will achieve agricultural prosperity and cure present ills.

Privileges, separate rights, in other words autonomy, are merely the recognition of the unalterable fact that Russia is composed not of homogeneous territories, and populations, but of very heterogeneous ones, differing immensely in race, creed, modes of thought, geographic and climatic conditions, making separate treatment for each fragment indispensable.

The case of the Cossacks is about the only remaining one of which it can be said that it is in a healthy condition. The Cossacks, especially those on the Don (composing the most important settlements of the kind in point of population and territory), are in the main satisfied with their present lot, alone among the 130 millions of Russian subjects. And why is this so? The only answer can be, after inspecting the situation, that the Cossacks still enjoy a certain measure of independence and self-government. Russian bureaucracy with its centralising tendencies is still excluded from their settlements. There is prosperity and contentment among the Cossacks, but this does by no means diminish their loyalty to the Czar, and, as a matter of fact, the Cossack even to-day makes the best Russian coloniser, the most efficient advance guard of Russian conquest and Russian civilisation, whether it be on the borders of the Ussuri or Amoor, in Manchuria, or Saghalien. Their chief *hetman* is even to-day the

Czarevitch, appointed by the Czar himself as his locumtenens. It is strange indeed that with such a purely Russian illustration (for the Cossack, be it remembered, is by race, creed, and language a thorough Russian) of the blessings of self-government and local autonomy before their eyes, anybody in Russia should fail to be an enthusiastic champion of provincial independence.

The question how it comes that the Cossacks alone have escaped so far the St. Petersburg craze for uniformity (or at least escaped it in a measure) may be answered in various ways. The most plausible reason for it may be found in the fact that the Cossacks are a pretty tough morsel to swallow even for so potent and autocratic a government as the Russian. The Don Cossacks alone present a first-class military strength of sixty-five thousand men, in a separate organisation and under self-chosen commanders, and the experience of the past, the events in Russian history with which the names of Pougatcheff, Stenka Rasin, and Bogdan Chmelnizki are connected—risings under these local chiefs which it took deluges of blood to smother—have shown the Little Father in St. Petersburg that these men are not to be trifled with. Assuredly to meddle with their liberties would not be so easy a task as the extinction of similar liberties has proved in the case of Finland and the Baltic Germans. The central government, therefore, so far at least, has withstood the pressure of bureaucracy, eager to secure new fields of spoil.

It might be argued that considered in itself a steady

policy of rendering Russian in language and sentiment all the non-Russian parts of the empire is a laudable one. There is, besides, the authority of some eminent writers on Russia in favour of such a contention. Chief amongst these is Leroy-Beaulieu, and he is backed up by some others, all non-Russians. But to argue in this wise is to misconceive some of the salient features of Russian life. Certainly, the Russian is right in trying to make good subjects out of Yakoots, Cheremissians, and similar savage tribes; he is likewise right in Russianising more or less Turcomans and other populations in Central Asia, all of them on a lower political and social plane than he himself occupies. To do so is the part of sagacious policy, but the case is far different when it comes to bringing down to his own lower level many millions of non-Russians inhabiting the Western border provinces, such as the Poles and Lithuanians, the populations of the Baltic provinces, and the Finns, all of whom have been and are still "civilisation bearers" for the less advanced Russian. That surely cannot be the part of wisdom, more especially in the case of those, like the Lithuanians, the Baltic Germans, and the Finns, who up to the hour a virulent campaign of Russification was opened against them, had unquestionably been fully as loyal to Czar and empire as the Russian populations proper.

As a political and sociological fact the dogma will hold good for any country that nationalistic propaganda is only permissible and beneficial to a nation

when such propaganda includes at the same time the raising of the moral, intellectual, and social level. In all other cases such a propaganda is an almost undiluted evil and in the long run works nothing but serious mischief to the nation at large.

It is a singular fact that the Russian shows in his contact with populations on a lower level of civilisation residing within his empire unusual indulgence, sympathy, and forbearance. Thus, it is astonishing that despite the ruthless proselyting spirit shown by the Holy Synod in the Western border provinces for the purpose of converting those populations to the Orthodox Church, there are still pagans in considerable number dwelling within several provinces of European Russia. One of the latter is Perm, where a heathen population of about 150,000 in number has been left entirely undisturbed. Towards Mohammedan Tartars and Mongolians, too, very little of converting zeal is shown by M. Pobyedonostseff.

Another fact which must not be forgotten in this connection is that Russia, after all, is still a very sparsely settled country, when compared with countries to the west. The density of her population is only about ten to the square mile, for European Russia about thirty-five. Furthermore, she is even now largely an Asiatic empire; her expansion has been, is, and must be altogether in that direction. The rate of her increase in Asia has for a large number of years past shown an annual average of about fifty

thousand square miles. The great majority of Russians of to-day feel themselves far more as an Asiatic power than as a European one, which is but natural.

Taking all these facts together, it is worse than folly, something very much like national suicide, wilfully to hamper by systematic persecution of her forty-four millions of non-Russians the growth of the empire as a whole in all the elements of culture.

It is still the old battle in Russia that has been raging ever since the days of Peter the Great—the latter at the head of the Europeanising movement, his son Alexis leading the Asiatising current.

Russia has always found enough reasons and enough money to carry on an aggressive foreign policy; but for interior improvements, for all those purposes which would make of her in the course of time a truly civilised and cultured country, she has unfortunately never had time or money. To continue in her aggressive foreign policy means for her the retarding of internal civilising methods. With it she becomes untrue to her better mission. She will not be able to raise her Asiatic populations to her own higher level, but instead will bring down to her lower standard of life and ideals those elements within her entire population that have so far urged and pushed her onto the path of progress.

A crushing defeat for Russia in a large foreign war would be a severe lesson, it is true, one very painful to Russian pretensions, Russian jingo spirit, and in a certain sense to Russian patriotism of every stripe. But,

for all that, such a defeat would be a blessing in disguise to the whole nation, drunk with aggressive power as they are, and with a national conscience callous to the best dictates of enlightened humanity and to the unwritten laws of fairness in dealing with weaker but more gifted and advanced races.

In much the same sense the Crimean War, bitter as its outcome was not alone to the reigning despot, Nicholas I., but as well to the whole nation, proved in the end a great blessing to the Russian people. It showed, what all along had been claimed by keen foreign observers, that this immense giant, the Russian Empire, was standing on "feet of clay," and the knowledge thus brought home to Russian statecraft was, after the death from a broken heart of Nicholas I., the impetus that brought internal reform. The successor, Alexander II., saw plainly that to organise and make available to the full the crude potentialities of Russia it was requisite to make an earnest effort at curing the manifold internal diseases from which the nation was suffering.

To see this clearly meant, in the first place, the abolition of serfdom and the planning of provincial autonomy, thus for the first time in the national history placing Russia squarely on the highroad to internal prosperity. Russia at the end of the Crimean War was at the very end of her resources available for fighting purposes. She was plunged in a mire of debt and poverty. Another similar defeat would be a rude

awakener to Russia and to the men responsible for her present retrograde system of government. The lesson would be harsh but salutary. From being puffed up with vainglory and a sense of supposed illimitable power and irresponsibility, Russia would then become imbued with a spirit of healthy repentance for past misdeeds, for wrongs committed against civilisation. She might then find time to devote herself seriously to the task so long neglected, the task of entering on a programme of internal reform, rousing the nation for the first time to intelligent and joint effort in behalf of the true ideals of civilisation. Russia's best friends can wish for nothing better than that. Glory of foreign conquest is but a hollow thing when it means continued misery at home, when success abroad would be equivalent to neglect of urgent domestic needs.

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